PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1993–94

COMPRISING PERIOD
20 June—1 July 1994

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 245

THIRTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1993-94

House of Commons

Monday 20 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Airport Privatisation

1. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his policy to encourage local authorities to privatise their airports.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): Yes, it is our policy to encourage local authorities to privatise their airports. East Midlands was sold last summer. The BAA has operated private sector airports very successfully in Scotland and the south-east since 1987.

Mr. Coombs: Given the enormous success of the privatised British Airports Authority in running Heathrow and Gatwick, will my right hon. Friend encourage the privatisation of Birmingham airport, especially as it will need to attract additional private capital for the £400 million investment programme that it is planning for the next 10 years?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the success of the privatisation of the British Airports Authority. It has led—this is very relevant to his question—to a substantial increase in capital investment in all its airports and to a great improvement in its services. It is much more enterprising and is now selling its services to countries overseas, which demonstrates the success of our policy.

I understand that Birmingham airport has substantial capital investment plans. It is right that those should be taken forward in partnership with the private sector and I welcome the fact that Birmingham intends to do so.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Will not my constituents, who last year received £800,000 for the local authority from Manchester airport's profits, lose while the Minister's friends in the City gain from that absurd policy?

Mr. MacGregor: There is no reason why they should lose. The fact of the matter is that everyone has gained from the privatisation of the BAA. The passenger has gained very substantially. Instead of paying for capital expenditure from public resources, we now receive tax in return from the British Airports Authority. All round, it has been a very successful policy and I believe that it would apply just as well in Manchester.

Road Accidents

2. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning his proposals to reduce road accidents involving newly qualified drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Since issuing the consultation document "New Driver Safety", we have received more than 500 representations supporting action in that area. Given that support, I am now taking forward four main proposals: retesting for serious traffic offenders among young drivers; a separate theory test; post-driver training linked to lower insurance premiums; and road safety education at 16-plus.

Mr. Brandreth: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that we have the best record on traffic safety of almost anywhere in the world? Since records began in 1926, the statistics are better than ever, despite a 14-fold increase in the number of vehicles. New drivers remain a critically

important area, as about 20 per cent. of accidents are caused by about 10 per cent. of licence holders. Can he give us some idea of the date on which he will be introducing the important measures that he outlined, especially that relating to post-driver training and insurance premiums?

Mr. MacGregor: I confirm that we have one of the best safety records in Europe and that the number of fatal accidents on the roads is lower than at any time than since accident statistics were first recorded in 1926. Given the huge increase in traffic, that is a substantial achievement. The greater proportion of accidents is among young drivers and new drivers generally. My hon. Friend is right to concentrate on that, as I have done. I hope to be able to introduce post-driver training linked to lower insurance premiums. Following my discussions with the major insurance societies during the past few months, I hope to be able to bring forward that scheme in the autumn.

Mr. Tony Banks: Although I welcome what the Minister said with regard to newly qualified drivers, will he tell the House what he is doing—and of his concern—about the elderly driver? Recently, there have been a number of accidents involving drivers aged 70 and over. Is not it about time that we set an upper limit, so that such people are retired from driving because, in certain cases, they are also a hazard on the roads? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. MacGregor: I heard an intervention from the Opposition Benches which suggested that the hon. Gentleman might take a different view once he reaches the age of 70. There is a much higher proportion of accidents among new drivers and that is why it is right to have special measures in that direction. The hon. Gentleman will know that retesting, medical certificates and so on are required for older drivers of a certain age and it would not be right to put a ceiling on those. Some people are capable of driving successfully and safely well beyond the age of 70.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: May I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said and put it to him that it would be wise if the theory test were not too complicated? It should test obvious rather than arcane things, as there are a few simple causes for most traffic crashes.

Mr. MacGregor: There has been a general welcome to the idea of having a theory test before new drivers go on to the practical test. We are developing the theory test now, working with the National Foundation for Education Research. The theory test certainly must be in place by 1996 and I will bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said.

Crossrail

3. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding the future of crossrail.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): We continue to support the crossrail project. We were disappointed by the Private Bill Committee's decision not to find the preamble to the Crossrail Bill proved. We are considering, with the Bill's promoters—London Underground Ltd. and British Rail—how best to proceed.

Mr. Cunningham: Will the Minister give the House an assurance that he will expedite this matter as soon as possible, bearing in mind the considerable anxieties outside the House regarding the matter and the economic potential of the scheme in terms of creating jobs?

Mr. Norris: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of the scheme and, as I said, it is for the promoters to find a way forward. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Transport have made clear their support for the scheme and we are studying how best to take it forward.

Mr. Lidington: Has my hon. Friend had time to study the representations from organisations representing business and commerce in London and the south-east, and the united view of local authorities across party-political lines, which remains firmly that crossrail is needed in the national interest and particularly in the interests of our capital city and the south-east?

Mr. Norris: I have indeed, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the tremendous work that he has done in sponsoring the Bill in the House. We were disappointed that the Private Bill Committee did not find the preamble of the Bill proved and I know that that sense of disappointment was widely shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

It is a shame that, in examining how this condition might have been brought about, the role of the Liberal Democratic council in Tower Hamlets should have been so extraordinary. The Liberal Democrats' public national policy is to favour public transport and to be dreadfully anti-car, but it wants to make sure that those public transport schemes never come near a Liberal-controlled council.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister make a distinction between a link between crossrail and suburban, domestic services on Union Railways to Kent, and a link with a possible Stratford international station? Would not the latter provide useful links to international rail services from central and west London and add to the already 150-odd stations which would be directly linked to Stratford by fast rail services?

Mr. Norris: I know of the hon. Gentleman's great interest in the further development of Stratford. He rightly puts his finger on the considerable complexity which surrounds the linkage between crossrail, for example, and other rail systems such as a second rail link. In drawing attention to the difference between a straight link and the exchanges which might be possible in Stratford, the hon. Gentleman does the House a service. I cannot comment specifically on the proposals for intermediate stations or on the outline powers in relation to crossrail, because they are matters yet to be determined.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Crossrail Bill was scuppered by the votes of two Labour Members? Does he accept that he would have the gratitude of all the people of London if he undid the consequences of that unholy alliance between the Liberal Democratic party in Tower Hamlets and Labour Members?

Mr. Norris: The whole House is aware that the Private Bill Committee procedure has served the House for many years. Many hon. Members, including myself, who have

considered private Bills have considered how to address the principles behind those Bills entirely objectively. I would not dream of suggesting that that was not the case on this occasion. That does not detract, however, from the general disappointment felt on both sides of the House at the decision on crossrail.

Mr. Raynsford: The Minister will be well aware, even though he did not tell the House about it, of the extent of support from Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and the Labour party for the principle of crossrail. We believe that the Bill should be recommitted. Having said that, serious concerns remain about the funding of crossrail, particularly if substantial works are deemed necessary to establish links at both ends of the route and to meet environmental concerns. Will the Minister therefore give an undertaking, on behalf of his Treasury colleagues, that any such works deemed necessary should not be prejudiced or sacrificed for lack of public finance?

Mr. Norris: We have always insisted, quite rightly, that the scheme should be taken forward in conjunction with the private sector and we anticipated substantial private sector investment. I believe that that is the proper way to proceed. There are great merits in that process, not least in terms of the value engineering that the private sector can bring to such large projects. The Government have made clear their commitment through the statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time a couple of weeks ago and the many statements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and me. Any alteration to the scheme would obviously be a matter for the promoters, because they would have to determine how it should be funded and taken forward.

Freight

4. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage freight to be moved by rail rather than by road.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): We are encouraging rail freight in a number of ways. We have liberalised access to the rail network; facilitated the restructuring of British Rail's freight businesses prior to sale; improved the freight facilities grants scheme; introduced a new track access grant for marginal freight flows; and raised the maximum gross vehicle weight limit to 44 tonnes for combined road-rail transport.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rail strike, in which workers are demanding 11 per cent. for nothing whatever in return, will tip freight back on to the roads, which will be to the detriment of the environment and, of course, the long-suffering public?

Mr. Freeman: I hope that everyone accepts that significant pay increases cannot be afforded without compensating improvements in productivity. If inflationary pay settlements are awarded, costs and prices go up and that means freight is tipped back on to the roads.

Ms Jowell: Will the Minister urgently tell the director of Railtrack to undertake a study of alternative routes for freight other than through the centre of London? Does he accept that misery is caused to thousands of Londoners, including my constituents, as a result of increased freight traffic? Does he also accept that 75 per cent. of freight traffic is intended for destinations outside London? Will he draw to Mr. Horton's attention the successful all-party lobby of Parliament today organised by the London Channel Tunnel Group as evidence of the extent of concern felt across London?

Mr. Freeman: The answer to the first part of the hon. Lady's question is yes—we have instructed Railtrack to consider an alternative west-about route through Redhill and it will consider the costs involved.

I understand the concerns of those who live by the west London line because of increased noise, particularly caused by the movement of freight at night. That traffic will be modest to begin with, but I will visit the line together with local Members of Parliament, Labour and Conservative, on 13 July.

Mr. Dunn: The Minister will be aware that those of my constituents who use the A20 and the A2 want a better balance between rail and road for the dispatch of freight to and from the Kent coast to London. As long as there is uncertainty about the movement of freight, caused by regular railway strikes called by the RMT union, will not the effect be to keep freight on the road, ultimately damaging the environment of north-west Kent?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because, if one compares the rail freight and road haulage industries, he must be right. Every time a strike interrupts the supply of passenger or freight services, custom is lost. This strike, therefore, should be condemned by everyone with a real interest in supporting the rail industry.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that the Government have a cheek to attack railway people who go on strike for more pay, especially when the Government do not have the guts to introduce a pay policy and instead use a policy based on the dole queue? They have someone permanently present at those talks when they are supposed to be outside. In any case, if the boss of Railtrack can get £120,000 for three days a week, why should the Government condemn workers who are trying to get a living wage?

Mr. Freeman: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has made plain on a number of occasions over the past two years, there is widespread support in the country for the notion that one cannot afford to make inflationary pay increases of that significant size without compensatory improvements in productivity. We have been through this matter before. The days of something for nothing are finished.

Rail Services (Competition)

5. **Mr. Hawksley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of competition on rail services.

Mr. MacGregor: Evidence from previous transport privatisations shows that the introduction of competition encourages the development of better-quality services. I am confident that customers—passengers and freight—will benefit from more services of higher quality, improved efficiency and better value for money.

Mr. Hawksley: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging answer. What effect will the industrial action by signalmen, who are asking for 11 per cent. without increased productivity and are supported by the Opposition, have on competition in the future?

Mr. MacGregor: One must bear in mind the fact that the competition is road and air, so it is important that Railtrack and British Rail be thoroughly efficient and competitive. The demand for a no-strings increase of at least 11 per cent. in signalmen's basic pay is inflationary and will not help the competitive position of Railtrack or the railway services. On Monday, the Railtrack board offered a 2.5 per cent. annual pay increase, which is in line with many other pay offers in both the public and private sectors. It also offered, and is keen to have, talks on major reforms and restructuring of signalmen's terms and conditions. It is irresponsible and damaging to the railways for the unions to undertake a series of strikes on an 11 per cent., no-strings pay claim. It is important that the talks begin again and I am anxious that that should happen. The real question, however, is for the Opposition, who have been notable for their silence on this issue. Does the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) approve of the strike for an 11 per cent., no-strings pay increase? Yes or no?

Mr. Harvey: Does the Minister believe that potential bidders for the franchise to run trains on the south-west line have an accurate picture of what they are letting themselves in for, given the reliability figures compiled for the passengers charter? Is not the Minister concerned that as important a flagship of Government policy as the citizens charter should compute inaccurate figures and measure wrong times? Some of the punctual trains are recorded as having gone twice and some less punctual ones are recorded as never having arrived. Should not a search party be sent out for the passengers who are in official limbo and compensation be given to season ticket holders?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that the figures be accurate. If they are not, we shall certainly look at the matter.

Sir Anthony Durant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the commuters of Reading are completely fed up with the strike, as a result of which many are now climbing on buses that run from Reading to London, which is an efficient service at about two thirds the cost? Does he agree that commuters will not return to the railways unless the railways wake up to the problem?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right. That is the danger for jobs in the railway industry of a pay increase of at least 11 per cent. without any productivity improvements. However, I emphasise again that the chairman of Railtrack has said that he wants to achieve a settlement on the restructuring—which is separate from the immediate pay offer—which rewards the signalmen for their skills and gives them a modern employment package. That restructuring must offer value for money, for the reason that my hon. Friend gives, but it is quite separate from an 11 per cent. demand with no strings attached. That is why I call on the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to condemn that demand and, above all, to condemn a strike that is damaging to the railways.

Mr. Dobson: If, as the Secretary of State asserts, it would be inflationary to find the £5 million that it would cost to pay the 5.7 per cent. increase that was offered by Railtrack and later withdrawn, what does he think the £7 million that Railtrack has expended on refurbishing its offices is? Is that inflationary or is it deflationary?

Was the offer withdrawn because the newly appointed bosses of Railtrack are incompetent, stupid and act in bad faith, or was it because the Secretary of State intervened and prevented them from making the offer, despite the fact that his departmental press office was lying and saying that there had been no ministerial interference?

Mr. MacGregor: I have made my position clear every time that I have been asked. I have frequent discussions with the board of Railtrack and members of the board of British Rail about public sector pay policy and I shall continue to do so. People would expect me to have a clear view about the Government's general position on public sector pay policy.

It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not establish the facts about Railtrack's premises. I understand that the actual cost of the premises is £1.8 million, which is a very modest arrangement for a very important body.

The whole House will have noticed that, once again, the hon. Gentleman has not made clear his position on the strike. Once again, if he is silent, he is condoning a pay increase with no strings attached of at least 11 per cent., causing great discomfort to passengers and potential damage to the railways—a pay increase that few other people in the country in the public or private sector are receiving. I take it that he will now take the opportunity to condemn that strike as irresponsible.

Road Traffic (Hastings and Rye)

6. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last visited Hastings and Rye to assess its road traffic needs.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Key): On 19 May, I travelled along the A259/A27 south coast route from Dymchurch to Lewes, passing through Hastings and Rye, to see for myself the road for which we have 11 major schemes programmed.

Mrs. Lait: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and ask him whether he has seen the mischievous article in *The Observer* yesterday, which said that there might be some falling back in the plans for the A259 through my constituency. Is he aware of the worry that that will cause the nearly 13 per cent. of my constituents who are unemployed and can he assure me that the economic development of my constituency, which is so vital, will proceed speedily with the continuation of those road plans?

Mr. Key: Yes, I thought that it was mischievous, too. My hon. Friend is right about the economic importance of transport in her area. Much of the A259 is picturesque, but primitive to say the least. Rye certainly needs its bypass, although the tunnel is expensive. The biggest problem is the Winchelsea to Icklesham section and I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to reconsider the needs of the area. That landscape and heritage are not only spectacular but unique and I could not recommend to my right hon. Friend the construction of a new road in the Brede valley.

Rail Privatisation

7. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on passengers of the plans to privatise the railways.

Mr. MacGregor: Our proposals will result in better, more attractive services being offered to rail passengers through the introduction of private sector skills, innovation and responsiveness to passengers' requirements.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that better services for rail passengers are what is required? Does he also agree that the present strike is causing a great deal of inconvenience to rail passengers? Is not he amazed that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) still has not condemned the strikers?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend about the effect on some passengers deciding not to use the railways and I want it to be entirely the other way round. I want to build up more opportunities for railwaymen with a great many more people using the railways. Let me try it another way. I have said that I think that a strike on the basis of a pay claim of at least 11 per cent. with no strings attached is irresponsible in present circumstances. I have also said that the restructuring talks offer big opportunities to sort out the pay, terms and conditions of signalmen in a modern employment package. Might I therefore ask the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras whether he agrees that it would be desirable for the strike not to take place in order that the restructuring talks, to ensure value for money in any arrangements, may now take place? Perhaps he will make his position clear on that.

Mr. Dalyell: Has the Secretary of State been in one of the modern signal boxes? If so, has not he observed the incredible technology and the responsibility that signalmen now have—just as much as air traffic controllers? Has the right hon. Gentleman actually seen a signal box in operation?

Mr. MacGregor: These matters have been spelt out to me, and I know exactly what the issues are. That is why Railtrack is seeking a modern employment package for signalmen, with up-to-date terms and conditions, and I agree with Railtrack. That is precisely the point; separate discussions should continue on that, and the chairman of Railtrack has made it clear that he is keen to engage in such discussions. I support him, and hope that the strikes will be called off for that reason as well—to enable the talks to continue.

Mr. Michael Brown: If my right hon. Friend has difficulty in hearing me, it is because I have not used my voice in the Chamber for the past year.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the lesson that we learn from the experience of privatisation is that industrial disputes tend to be non-existent when we have privatised an industry? Is not the lesson of the current dispute that the sooner we put Railtrack into private hands, the better?

Mr. MacGregor: I assure my hon. Friend that I never have any difficulty in hearing him. I have had no difficulty in hearing him to great effect during the past year, and now the whole House can do so again.

We have made it clear that our aim is to privatise Railtrack in due course, at the appropriate time. The immediate need, however, is to ensure a modern employment package for signalmen that is self-financing, offers value for money and is separate from the pay offer. I think that that should be done in a sensible way, without the threat of unnecessary strikes that damage the railway industry and, therefore, those employed in it. I repeat for the umpteenth time my request for the Opposition to make their position clear; and in doing so, I refer not only to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras but to the contenders for the party leadership, who have used fine phrases, but have run a mile from the first key issue that they faced.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State confirm that British Rail's signalling staff do extremely responsible jobs that are immensely important to everyone? Will he confirm that their representatives have been conducting negotiations about an improvement in their pay to reflect the improvement in productivity that has been taking place for several years? Will he confirm that the week before last those representatives believed that they had reached an interim agreement involving payment of 5.7 per cent. on account, and that that would be confirmed last week? Will he confirm that officials from his Department then summoned three members of the board of Railtrack and told them that it was not on, and that the boss of Railtrack had to be dragged back from his holiday—as did the chief negotiator, who had been holidaying in the West Indies?

Finally, does the Secretary of State recognise that it takes two sides to have an industrial dispute? Will he condemn Railtrack for its incompetence and stupidity—or will he condemn himself for intervening?

Mr. MacGregor: The Railtrack board made its offer last Monday afternoon. It was for a pay increase of 2.5 per cent.—exactly the same as the offer to British Rail, very similar to many other current public sector offers and, indeed, in excess of some private sector offers. The board also said that it was keen to undertake the restructuring talks as part of a separate exercise. The chairman of Railtrack has repeated that, and I strongly support him.

I repeat that it would be greatly in the interests of our reaching a sensible conclusion to this matter if the hon. Gentleman would condemn a strike based on an 11 per cent., no-strings-attached demand. We have all noticed that, despite many attempts to get him to do that, he has so far refused.

Sir David Madel: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if a further rail dispute is to be avoided, it will take all the skill of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, this evening and beyond it, to reach a solution? Does he further agree that, once the talks are under way, the threat of industrial action should be suspended and that management must show great patience in its talks with ACAS to try to work out a solution and to avoid another dispute?

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly hope that the talks can take place without further strike action, which would be unjustified and would be of no benefit to the railway system. However, the details of the negotiations on restructuring are a matter for the Railtrack board.

Diesel Cars

9. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of new cars sold used diesel fuel in each year since 1990.

Mr. Key: Six per cent., 9 per cent., 12 per cent. and 18 per cent. in 1993.

Mr. Williams: Despite the rapid rise in the popularity of diesel cars, the Minister is aware that a report earlier this year by the quality of urban air review group highlighted environmental problems with diesel cars, especially particulates—tiny soot particles—that are associated with lung cancer. What are the Government doing to persuade the motor industry to clean up emissions from diesel cars?

Mr. Key: Particulate emissions could prove a serious problem. However, on current levels of diesel penetration we expect particulate levels to decline. If diesel's share continues to increase rapidly, or if the Department of Health's Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants demonstrates that there is a need for further reductions in particulates, the Government may need to consider a range of measures to reduce levels.

Of course, further action on vehicles would need European Union agreement. The United Kingdom has supported European measures to cut emissions, which have been falling rapidly. Limits on particulates will be halved by 1996 and discussions have begun on further tightening. However, it is important to remember that diesels consume 23 per cent. less fuel, use less energy and produce 15 per cent. less carbon dioxide.

Mr. Matthew Banks: My right hon. Friend has drawn attention to diesel fuel. Can he confirm that, owing to price differentials, unleaded petrol accounts for 50 per cent. of the market?

Mr. Key: I can so confirm, and it is a major advance brought about by this Government. Indeed, it has been a more rapid advance than in other Community countries. It is important to remember that catalytic converters have had a dramatic impact on the levels of emissions from those cars fitted with them.

Ms Walley: Given the growth in traffic, is not it time that the Government paid more attention to the report from the Department of the Environment's quality of urban air review group? Should not there be some real action and should not we go back to the real reason why we have such problems—the fact that the current growth of traffic is unsustainable?

Mr. Key: The forecast growth of traffic will not have the impact suggested by the hon. Lady. The rapid decline in emissions more than makes up for growth.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that, over the past five years, the Government have made considerable strides in improving emissions from cars? Does he further agree that one of the problems is that many older cars that could be transferred to unleaded petrol are not being transferred? A further problem is that many diesel-engined cars are still dirty and more tests are required to ensure that they are cleaned up.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; however, the problem with older cars that cannot be fitted with converters will, self-evidently, run itself into the ground. On the question of smoky diesels, there is already a smoky diesel line. We all have a responsibility to ensure that we properly maintain our cars. If motorists maintained their vehicles, both diesel and petrol, to the proper standards recommended by manufacturers, we would not have the current emission problem.

Benzene Emissions

11. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the subject of benzene emissions from vehicle exhausts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I have received several representations from hon. Members about the health effects of emissions, including benzene, from fuel. As a result of measures that we have already put in place, we are set to see a marked decline in all vehicle pollutants, including benzene, which will be sustained well into the next decade.

Mr. Miller: I thank the Minister for that reply. Has his Department evaluated the difference between unleaded and super-unleaded fuels and the aromatic hydrocarbons emitted from them? If not, will he, as a matter of urgency, call on the relevant Government research laboratories to start work on that especially important environmental consideration?

Mr. Key: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the matter, not least because, of course, Associated Octel Ltd. is in his constituency.

Mr. Miller: That has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Key: I know that that has nothing to do with it, except that it means that the hon. Gentleman has an interest in the matter; I am not for one moment imputing anything else. Yes, we have taken a great deal of interest in the problem of super-unleaded petrol, which has a higher octane factor than premium unleaded. It accounts for only 6 per cent. of the market, however, and the figure will decrease as more cars become capable of using premium unleaded. I am sure that this is just the first chapter in a long catalogue of matters that we need to address and are addressing through our professional advisers.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Health Service Trusts

28. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, pursuant to his oral answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column 13, what progress has been made in the review of NHS trusts.

Sir Peter Hordern (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): I understand that the National Audit Office expects to publish a review of Treasury management of national health service trusts in the autumn.

Mr. Hughes: That was the part of the answer that I could predict. In his reply on 18 April, the right hon. Gentleman told me that the Comptroller and Auditor General would reply to my letter about Guy's hospital "shortly". May I ask him how long is "shortly" and how soon I will get the answer?

Sir Peter Hordern: I understood that the hon. Gentleman had received a reply. If he has not, I will certainly see that he gets one and I apologise. The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the decision on the

allocation of resources is a matter for the Department for Health. Once the decision has been made, it will be a matter for the Public Accounts Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor General to study the matter if they see fit to do so.

Comptroller and Auditor General

30. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission when he next intends to discuss with the Secretary to the Cabinet the powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Sir Peter Hordern: I do not intend to do so. The powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General are matters for Parliament. They are set out in the Exchequer and Audit Department Acts, the National Audit Act 1983, and other legislation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it in the interests of Parliament for the powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General, an officer of Parliament, to be undermined by a Minister resisting an inquiry by the National Audit Office, as happened in the case of the call that I made for an inquiry into industrial training in the United Kingdom?

Sir Peter Hordern: I am not aware of the circumstances, but I should be very surprised if a Minister had resisted such an inquiry. In any event, I understand that the hon. Gentleman has discussed his allegations with the Comptroller and Auditor General and that the Comptroller and Auditor General has agreed to produce a public report in due course.

Overseas Development Administration

31. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what funds have been made available by the Public Accounts Commission to the National Audit Office to investigate the work of the Overseas Development Administration.

Sir Peter Hordern: The Commission approved the National Audit Office's most recent corporate plan in July 1993 and its estimate for 1994-95 in December. We plan to meet to consider the 1994 corporate plan on 5 July. The voted funds enable the NAO to audit the financial accounts of Government Departments, including the Overseas Development Administration, and also to deliver about 50 major value-for-money outputs to Parliament each year. Selection of topics for investigation is based on a systematic review of expenditure and value for money, including the ODA, but the final decision on whether to proceed with investigation is a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor General, in consultation with the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Bayley: It has come to my notice that more than £500,000 from the ODA's budget is being spent on technical co-operation officers working to regulate tax havens in the Caribbean. That is in clear contradiction of the Government's stated policy of providing aid to the poorest people in the poorest countries. Why has not that been picked up by the Comptroller and Auditor General? Will the Chairman ensure that the Comptroller's attention is directed to that matter to ensure that a proper evaluation is made of whether Britain's overseas development technical co-operation programme is, indeed, delivering aid to poor people in poor countries?

Sir Peter Hordern: Let me see what I can do and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend suggest that the PAC investigate the huge increase in British exports to Malaysia as a result of the Pergau dam contract and the consequences for British exports of the campaign against that contract that is being run by Opposition Members?

Sir Peter Hordern: The PAC may wish to continue its inquiries into the Pergau dam, but that is a matter for the Chairman of the PAC and the Comptroller and Auditor General in consultation with each other.

TRANSPORT

Road Safety

12. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has that road safety has improved in towns and villages which have recently been bypassed.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Key): Bypasses of towns and villages greatly improve road safety, but often need to be accompanied by traffic-calming measures within the towns bypassed. Measures such as road humps and chicanes slow local traffic down and can reduce casualties by up to 70 per cent.

Mr. Paice: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that, when a new bypass is considered, any further road improvements should be anticipated? Is he aware that, in the village of Landbeach in my constituency, his Department is proposing a second bypass? It is not wanted by the residents and is a complete mystery to the local transport department, which sees no need for it.

Mr. Key: I had the pleasure of being in my hon. Friend's constituency only last week. Not surprisingly, the issue of the second bypass was raised with me then. I am aware of the questions raised by both the Landbeach and the Stretham bypasses, which, as local bypasses, are both priority 1 schemes. Consultants are now considering options around Landbeach and Stretham and the schemes are likely to become more in the way of on-line improvements than village bypasses. Against that background, and with the lack of local enthusiasm, which has been voiced by my hon. Friend so forthrightly, the consultants may need to consider the problems again.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care

32. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement on the results of the Commission's investigations into child care arrangements in Parliament.

Mr. A.J. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): A survey of potential demand for child care arrangements has been carried out under the aegis of

the Administration Committee. Following the decision of that Committee not to issue the report of the survey or to take any further action, the Commission is considering how to proceed.

Mr. Dowd: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware how disappointing most hon. Members will find that response? If he reads today's Order Paper, he will find that several of the questions tabled to him relate to this issue. That shows that there is widespread concern.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that if a scheme were to be introduced tomorrow, it would benefit only the grandchildren of the staff in this place who raised this issue many years ago? If the problems are logistical and physical, will the right hon. Gentleman consider with the Commission the introduction of a child care allowance, perhaps through a voucher system, so that some immediate provision can be made pending the more long-term or permanent provision that is obviously so necessary?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman should direct his disappointment at those of his hon. Friends and others who are members of the Administration Committee, and not at me, as I share a great deal of his disappointment. The provision of vouchers was one of the matters considered in the survey to which I referred. I hope that it will be possible to debate that and other issues, bearing in mind the fact that the Commission does not normally proceed to introduce a new service unless advised to do so by one of its Committees—in this instance, the Administration Committee—or following a debate in the Chamber as a result of which the House asks that the service be introduced.

Mr. Rathbone: May I welcome the Commission's reinvestigation of the subject, which shows that things have come quite a long way since the first child was born to a serving Member of the House, which was when my mother bore my half sister?

In thinking about child care in the House, will the right hon. Gentleman consider the provision of nursery schooling as well as basic child care facilities? It seems to me that we have the most marvellous opportunity to provide that essential element of education for young people who happen to be children of Members of Parliament.

Mr. Beith: As far as I know, the hon. Gentleman's personal connections are without parallel in the House. The issue that he has raised goes much wider than that of child care provision from the point of view of the staff of the House, in which the Commission is interested. It will be for the House more widely to consider whether a scheme of child care provision or of vouchers should extend to Members and their staff. It is the involvement of both the House staff and the staff of Members that makes this rather a complicated issue with which to deal.

Electronic Information System

33. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what consideration the Finance and Services Committee is giving to the report by the Information Committee on the provision of a Parliamentary data and video network, HC 237.

35. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what plans the Committee has to make provision for the introduction of an electronic information system for hon. Members and their staff.

Mr. Paul Channon (on behalf of the Finance and Services Committee): The Committee has already begun to consider the report from the Information Committee on the proposed network and it hopes to complete its consideration shortly.

Mr. Gunnell: Will the right hon. Gentleman say how much has been spent to date on developing the network? Can he assure me that the House will have an opportunity to debate the report before the recess so that progress can be made and so that hon. Members may have access to the network when they return in October?

Mr. Channon: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question concerns a matter that is extremely complicated; if he will allow me to do so, I will therefore write to him. On the second part of his question, I assure him that the House would have to have a debate before it proceeded to implement the report. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has already indicated that he hopes to hold such a debate before the summer recess.

Mr. Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while the rest of the country and the world are talking about information super-highways, we in this place are still limping along a muddy footpath? Such a system could save the House a great deal of money. It could improve the way we do things in the House and would act as a beacon to encourage the rest of the country and the world to use information technology. Can my right hon. Friend give us a better idea when the network will be in place and when a decision will be taken, so that every hon. Member may have an appropriate piece of equipment to link into the network?

Mr. Channon: I will ensure that the views of my hon. Friend and of the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) are made known to my Committee when it meets tomorrow to discuss the matter. No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) would like to take part in the debate when it occurs. If the House decides in principle to proceed with the recommendations of the Information Committee, we shall of course also look at ways of speeding the process up.

Disabled People (Access)

36. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if the Commission will authorise the expenditure necessary for a line of route for disabled persons to be created using the lift next to the Members' entrance; and what consideration he is giving to the structural consequences of the building and installing of new equipment to facilitate disabled access.

Mr. Beith: I understand that the Accommodation and Works Committee's inquiry into ways of improving access for disabled persons visiting the palace gives full consideration to the structural implications of any proposed modifications. I will arrange for the hon. Gentleman's other comments to be brought to the Committee's attention.

Mr. Dalyell: As with all old, venerable and distinguished buildings, is not there a danger, in making structural alterations to this place, of really harming that which people have come to visit and to see? Given the understandable and correct demand that disabled people should have access, however, does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would take very little imagination to use the lifts from New Palace Yard and, for that matter, from the other end, where Members of the other place have lift access to the main floor?

Mr. Beith: It is precisely the difficulty of accommodating changes to help the disabled in an historic structure which has meant that it has taken some time and very careful study to bring forward proposals to meet this pressing need. The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that there are entrances that have lift access at each end of the building. The entrance at the other end of the building is probably more usable from the point of view of the size of the lift than the entrance at this end of the building. However, those considerations are very much in the Committee's mind and I am sure that the Committee will be glad of the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Child Care

37. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if the Commission will publish the results of the survey on child care in the parliamentary estate.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave earlier.

Mrs. Prentice: Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating the parliamentary nursery campaign which, for 25 years, has advocated facilities for children in this place? Does he also agree that that matter affects not only female staff or female hon. Members but male staff and male hon. Members? Will the right hon. Gentleman try to ensure that he publishes the results of the survey, which will show quite clearly the huge need to have such facilities in place as soon as possible?

Mr. Beith: I agree with the hon. Lady's opening comments. I also agree that the debate which I feel will need to take place in the House should be informed by the results of the survey.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What is the cost to the taxpayer of the survey and the related inquiries?

Mr. Beith: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the figure.

38. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission what plans the Commission has to make public the information contained in the recent survey on child care in the parliamentary estate.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Mrs. Campbell: Did the right hon. Gentleman read in yesterday's issue of *The Independent on Sunday* about the case of Julia Rainsbury, a catering assistant in the House who earns £154 a week and has to fork out £60 a week in child care expenses? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is not fair that Ms Rainsbury does not receive any subsidy towards her child care costs while all right hon. and hon. Members receive a subsidy in the form of free parking?

Mr. Beith: My own view is in favour of help with child care costs. I have spoken in the House in favour of tax relief on them, too. Direct child care costs do not attract tax relief at present, but those of a workplace nursery do. Important issues such as that came up in our debates. I thought that members of our staff put their case before the Committee with great dignity.

Sitting Hours

42. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress is being made towards reforming the sitting hours of the House of Commons.

43. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the hours of working of the House.

44. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to implement the Jopling report.

45. **Mr. Channon:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress he is making with implementing the Jopling report.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I am currently engaged in constructive discussions with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). Our aim is to find ways of enabling the House to conduct its business in more sensible ways and with more sensible hours, without unacceptably reducing either the Government's capacity to carry out their programme or the Opposition's flexibility in deploying and pressing their case. It is my hope—I think that I can say "our hope"—that those discussions will enable us to map a way forward before the summer recess.

Mr. Pickthall: I am grateful to the Lord President of the Council for that encouraging reply. Does he agree that at least part of the low esteem in which the House is held by the general public stems from the barmy hours that we keep? Will he ensure that, in the discussions that he described, despite the recommendation of the Select Committee, he will consider bringing forward sittings into the mornings so that we might have something resembling a normal working day in which we could pursue a full-time single job as we were elected to do?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I would wish at this stage to hold out a significant prospect of going beyond the proposals in the report concerning the exchange, as it were, of some Wednesday mornings for some Fridays, but that is clearly one of the subjects of the discussion between the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and myself. As for what the hon. Gentleman called barmy hours, of course I should like to see further progress in avoiding late-night sittings, but I hope that he will not underestimate the extent to which we have already made progress on that front over the past decade or so.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: After considering the Select Committee's report, does my right hon. Friend agree that

time in this House could be more effectively spent if debates on the Floor of the House were properly timetabled and if Committee timetables were agreed in advance? One could then see whether it was feasible to serve on a Committee because one would know when it would finish. Will my right hon. Friend urgently pursue the Select Committee's recommendations and see whether the matter can be brought forward?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that there will be much sympathy with those thoughts among hon. Members on both sides of the House, although I detected the usual hostile muttering from the Opposition Benches below the Gangway. Of course, the very matters to which my hon. Friend refers are among those being discussed in general terms by myself and the Opposition.

Mr. Channon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there will never be unanimity about any proposals to reform the working of the House and that the present proposals represent the best compromise—unanimously supported—that has come forward for many years? Will he please make as speedy progress as possible? Did I hear him say that he hopes to have a debate before the summer recess—and if not, why not?

Mr. Newton: I certainly accept that they are constructive and worthwhile proposals, and they are bringing a constructive and worthwhile response. I do not think that I can go beyond that at the moment. If, as I hope, we are in a position to map a way forward before the summer recess, I would expect to seek an opportunity for debate on that map.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Lord President recognise that the idea that office hours should pertain in the House will have little impact on hon. Members who live outwith Greater London? What is essential is a pattern of sittings in the House like that in the European Parliament, which would enable us to balance our parliamentary, constituency and family responsibilities—along with a pattern of decentralisation to Scotland and Wales, of course.

Mr. Newton: Apart from the predictable but somewhat more tendentious last part of that question, I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Lady's point. We must strike a realistic balance between the different duties of Members of Parliament. I accept that greater certainty about the pattern of business is one of the prizes.

Prime Minister's Questions

47. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received over the format for Prime Minister's questions.

Mr. Newton: The matter has been raised in a number of recent exchanges in the House, including some at business questions. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Procedure Committee decided last week to seek ideas on possible options from myself and from the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). I shall seek to respond —as, no doubt, will they.

Mr. Winnick: Although the Prime Minister may have his reasons for wanting a change, will not Prime Minister's Question Time always be the subject of highly controversial matters? Without the open way in which we now put questions, hon. Members' questions on given subjects could be passed on to other Departments, placing Back Benchers at a vast disadvantage. The present system may have its faults, but the alternative seems to be worse.

Mr. Newton: In view of the all-too-characteristic aggression with which the hon. Gentleman asked his question, I should say that I understand that the matter was raised in the House not by the Prime Minister but by other hon. Members, who expressed concern about the format. No one is seeking to avoid proper questioning, let alone controversy. The question is whether the present format is best organised to achieve its aims in a satisfactory way.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In recent months, you will have noticed that, at each Question Time, Ministers are asking Opposition spokesmen questions. Would it be in order for an Opposition spokesman to answer a question at the Dispatch Box? If an Opposition spokesman were to answer, would you then rule that he or she was out of order?

Madam Speaker: Many of these questions are rhetorical, but I remind the entire House that "Erskine May", which I am not quoting precisely, states that Question Time is there for Members to seek information from the Government and to press the Government for action. I think that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point of order.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We are, as we are always reminded, a United Kingdom Parliament. As there has been no statement, will you tell us whether there is any way in which the House can express its concern about, and our sympathy for the victims of, the massacre of six innocent people in Northern Ireland? All they were doing was watching a football match on television and they were gunned down by murderous psychopaths.

Although I understand why we do not always have a statement after massacres, whether they are, as on Saturday, of Catholics or, as at other times, of Protestants, is not it necessary for us to show that we are not indifferent, that we deeply deplore what occurred and that we hope that those responsible for the massacre will be brought to justice?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not a point of order. We seldom have Government statements following a terrorist attack, but there are opportunities during Northern Ireland questions to raise security matters of that nature.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Reverting to the issue—

Madam Speaker: Order. There will be no reverting to any issue.

Mr. Hughes: It is a separate—

Madam Speaker: Order. There will be no reversion to the original issue. The hon. Gentleman will remember my words very clearly. I made it quite clear that it is for Members to seek information from the Executive and to press for action. I have said enough. That is the end of that point of order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you agree that the simplest way of resolving the problem—I know that it places you in some difficulty—is for the Government to call a general election, then our lot can answer all the questions?

Madam Speaker: It does not actually place me in any difficulty at all. My campaigning days are over—so if a general election were called, I would have a holiday.

Opposition Day

[13TH ALLOTTED DAY] [1ST PART]

Parliamentary Procedure

3.34 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I beg to move,

That this House notes the increasing public contempt for Parliament; believes that its organisation and procedures are anachronistic and irrelevant to the concerns of modern British society; notes with concern the Government's systematic erosion of Parliament's role in the consideration of legislation and its ability to hold the Executive to account for its actions; notes with particular concern the Government's use of civil servants for party political purposes; and calls for urgent and comprehensive reform of Parliament, including changes to the format of Prime Minister's Question Time.

Madam Speaker: I should inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tyler: Suppose for a moment, Madam Speaker, that you were sitting in that Chair, but Edward VI had not had a redundant chapel available in which the House of Commons could sit; instead, he had a redundant royal tennis court. Suppose that in Versailles in 1789, instead of a redundant tennis court, there had been a redundant chapel. If one believes architectural determinism, our continental neighbours would have the confrontational system of politics from which we have suffered in this country and you, Madam Speaker, would look at a consensus of political views in a semicircle.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): That is factually true.

Mr. Tyler: As my hon. Friend says, that is factually true.

The question that we must ask ourselves is whether the two-party system is a product of that accident of history or whether, in some way, we have determined our own architecture and suffered accordingly. What is certainly true is that the consensus building of the semicircle has proved to be a great deal more sensitive to the pluralist politics of the 20th century—and possibly the 21st century—than the anachronisms of confrontation from which we still suffer in this place.

As hon. Members may have already detected, I do not have any great credentials for moving the motion. I studied political history in my long-distant academic past. I am a member of the Select Committee on Procedure—I do not think that that qualifies me for anything much. But, perhaps more germanely, I am back here as the prize retread, having been first elected 20 years ago, and, therefore, perhaps in a unique position to compare what happened in the early 1970s with what is happening in the 1990s. In the 1970s, television had not arrived and nor had the Select Committees. I shall come back to both those reforms in due course.

My essential thesis is that those two changes, of themselves, cannot resist and reverse the tide of alienation—the alienation of Parliament from the people. The institution of Parliament has become dominated by party games, with the side effect of the stark dichotomy that few people outside this place recognise as relevant any more.

Parliament has fallen into public disrepute—*[Interruption.]*—as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr.

[Mr. Tyler]

Skinner) no doubt may vouchsafe. This institution is seen as old-fashioned and irrelevant, and its Members lazy, badly behaved and self-indulgent—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members behind me may deny that, but they are all too keen to quote the polls when the polls suit them. The polls show that 56 per cent. of the public are dissatisfied with the way in which hon. Members collectively do their job; only 32 per cent. are satisfied. Just 12 per cent. believe that we work hard—nearly four times as many think we do not. Four out of five British people believe that "feeding time at the zoo" is a fair description of the House of Commons.

The media stimulate that response because they emphasise the conflict in this place and ignore the consensus. The television cameras are on for Question Time; they are rarely on in Select Committees.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford) *rose—*

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: I will not give way because I want to make some progress.

We are seen in this place as unnecessarily argumentative, and it would appear that one or two hon. Members now wish to prove that point. Sixty-four per cent. of the public think that politicians emphasise what we disagree about; only 37 per cent. think that we emphasise what we agree on. Parliament's bad reputation is a prime cause of the public's disenchantment with the whole process of politics.

Mr. Burns *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: No, I will not give way.

The House of Commons is seen as being out of touch because, in many important respects, we are out of touch. Several hon. Members here will vouchsafe that many women in the community think that this Parliament is unrepresentative because only one tenth of our total membership are women while, of course, more than half the general population are.

In 1992, at the last general election, 24 per cent. of the voters did not support either of the major parties. Their views ended up being represented in the House by only 7 per cent. of the Members. Obviously, the argument for electoral reform and a fairer voting system is as strong as ever.

Despite being so unrepresentative, the two major parties continue to dominate the procedures and debates of the House. Almost 25 years ago, 90 per cent. of the population voted for the two parties. Today, that is not the case. In the 1992 election, the combined two-party vote dropped to 75 per cent. A week ago, when the Prime Minister claimed a return to the Buggin's turn two-party system, it dropped to just over two thirds—just less than 70 per cent.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Gentleman is rightly trying to guide the House into behaving in a way that leads to more popular respect. Could he say whether the expression "Buggin's turn" was used by the Prime Minister or whether it is a phrase which he is ascribing to the Prime Minister?

Mr. Tyler: The phrase was used as a description of the way in which the Prime Minister referred to a return to the two-party system. I am glad to make that point clear.

No one can say that our debates in this place represent the full range of perspectives and opinions in the country. Only the most simplistic partisan could pretend that every issue could be viewed as Government versus Opposition or Conservative versus Labour. That is not the real world. None of our constituents and none of the public see the politics of this country in that way. Yet the House continues to operate as if that were true. Parliament's traditions, bizarre as they are, often cause consternation to our constituents and no doubt to those non-present people in the Gallery. "I spy strangers", top hats, convoluted language: is it any wonder that the public feel that we are performing some sort of cynical ritual?

The reality is that Parliament is not fulfilling its basic functions. Its first function is to call to account those who govern. That is true of the Opposition, whatever party is in opposition. That is our job. It is also the primary function of Government Back Benchers. Every so often, with a little freedom from the Whips, we see that happening—not, unfortunately, very frequently. The second function is the examination, criticism and approval of legislation. I shall deal with both those subjects briefly.

In calling the Executive to account, a fundamental principle of the British constitution is that the Government are accountable through Ministers to Parliament. Such Government accountability is essential if we are to have responsible Government. We have seen the creation and development of the departmental Select Committees. I welcome them and I am sure that all Members of Parliament recognise the effective work that they do. However, few would claim that they exercise such effective scrutiny of Ministers and their Departments that the full House need no longer fulfil that function. The Select Committees report critically, but how often do we get an opportunity to debate their conclusions in full and to follow through those conclusions to some reform?

I believe that the most important reason for the failure of the House of Commons to exercise its function is a lack of information. Government activities are not made available to the Opposition parties. Our winner-takes-all political system means that members of the Opposition parties are shut out of decisions and policy making. That is obviously exacerbated by the fact that the Conservative Government have been on the Treasury Bench for 15 years.

Let us consider some of the ways in which the parliamentary question is supposed to be able to elicit information and fails. In recent years, Ministers have developed a number of techniques for evading questions. They have become masters of the art. Holding answers delay a comprehensive written reply for several days. They say, "I will write to the hon. Member", but when the letter eventually arrives, it is not available to other Members.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: No, I will not give way. There will be time for other Members to speak in due course.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: No, I will not give way.

Thirdly, Ministers agree to put the information requested in the House of Commons Library, which is also an effective way to deny other Members the full explanation given in the answer to the question.

I shall give an example. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) asked the Minister of Agriculture,

Fisheries and Food to place in the Library the results of market research on her Department's advertising and publicity campaign. He asked her to do so because she had stated in an earlier reply that such research existed for a range of campaigns. What finally arrived, after much pressure, were the results of research on only a couple of the many campaigns. Clearly, the answer did not meet the question. Any hon. Members or members of the public who wanted to look up the answer could not do so.

Ministers also say that the information requested "is not available in the form requested," or "in a complete form". Another of my colleagues asked the Secretary of State for Health for background information and data on monitoring disciplinary procedures against doctors. The Minister of State responded that the data were not available centrally. Presumably inadvertently, however, he then enclosed the data in an incomplete form, with a little note on the top, "Do not send". I do not know whether the civil servant sent it on purpose or whether it was a mistake, but how revealing that is of Ministers' attitudes.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as he was in the House many years ago and can compare different Governments. Does he agree that, irrespective of the merits of our procedures—there is room for improvement—he is properly exposing to the British public, if only the media will so allow, not the failure of Parliament, but the failure of the Government to take Parliament and its procedures seriously?

Mr. Tyler: I shall come to that matter. The problem has certainly been exacerbated by Governments' attitudes. I recall that previous Government, and some of the gambits that are being used now were developed in those years. We cannot let any Front Bench off the hook.

All hon. Members are well aware of the buck-passing between Departments. The Government have raised evasion to an art form, which is perhaps best expressed in that phrase coined by a former hon. Member, Mr. Alan Clark, who doubtless had experience of it—"economical with the actualité". We in Cornwall might not recognise that last word, but I think that we understand the sense of the expression. That is a very good way to describe the evasions that are now coming to the surface through the Scott inquiry on arms sales to Iraq.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham) *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: No, I will not give way. I have a limited number of things to say and there will be plenty of time for other people to speak.

Whitehall's guidance on parliamentary questions says that answers to Members of Parliament should be

"factual, straightforward and meticulously accurate."

The Scott inquiry was told by a former civil servant, however, that

"Questions should be answered to give the maximum degree of satisfaction to the questioner. That doesn't mean they should necessarily be full."

The Pergau dam affair was another example of the way in which limited information can be given to the House. In 1991, the then Minister for Overseas Development said that there was no question of linking aid and arms deals. Subsequently, the Foreign Secretary said that the two for a time became entangled. Why is entangled not the same as linked?

The Minister responsible for open government—surely a misnomer—has claimed that Ministers have a right to lie to the House of Commons. He said that it is sometimes

"necessary to say something that is untrue in the House of Commons".

He gave as his precedent Lord Callaghan's statement on the 1967 devaluation, for which he later apologised, but he did not withdraw the accusation. The Minister said that evasive answers to questions can be justified because

"much of the Government activity is much more like playing poker than playing chess. You can't put all your cards up at one time."

Obviously there must be certain cases when Ministers cannot be completely candid to the House; perhaps matters relating to sterling and defence are examples. But the Minister, in his misdirected candour, failed to recognise the distinction between the national or public interest on the one hand and narrow party political interest on the other. He failed to see the distinction between lie avoidance and truth evasion, and he unwittingly identified for us all one of the Government's serious attacks on ministerial accountability to the House.

I believe that Whitehall's guidance on parliamentary questions must be reviewed and rewritten, and freedom of information legislation would be an important back-up to effective parliamentary accountability. Already this afternoon, there have been questions about the effectiveness of Prime Minister's Question Time. This is a part of the parliamentary day and it is apparently what most attracts television producers.

Looking back at *Hansard* for 1974—before television—I was interested to note that the then Prime Minister, now Lord Wilson, and the then Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who sometimes we think still is, were able to exchange real information. The Leader of the Opposition asked only one question and did not make three miniature speeches, and there were not three miniature speeches in reply from the Prime Minister.

Does it really persuade any hon. Member—let alone the public—that that 15-minute partisan jousting match elicits information? Does any hon. Member really believe that the series of miniature speeches from the Leader of the Opposition, the patsy questions from Government Members and the point scoring of the Prime Minister in reply produce any form of accountability? The traditional view of Prime Minister's Question Time is that is the centrepiece of parliamentary democracy. Heaven help us if it is.

A number of suggestions have been put forward and I was delighted to see that the Prime Minister agreed with my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) that there is a need for reform; but we must see what is on the table. I have great sympathy with the view of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that advance notice will just give more warning to the Prime Minister of how partisan he can be on the day.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does my hon. Friend also accept that it would be helpful to democracy if Prime Ministers in this country did what Prime Ministers in other European countries do, which is to accept that good ideas do not always come from their own party and to say so publicly at Question Time and also to apologise when they and their Governments have made mistakes?

Mr. Tyler: Having now given proportional representation to hon. Members from the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, I do not propose to take any more interventions.

I agree very much with my hon. Friend. It is interesting that the Australian and New Zealand Parliaments—where I understand they have advance warning of questions—have not achieved any improvement in their Prime Minister's Question Time, but that in the Scandinavian Parliaments, to which I think my hon. Friend is particularly referring, there have been notable improvements.

I believe that unless we deal with the root disease, we will not achieve any improvements in the beer garden of Prime Minister's Question Time. But that is much more deep-seated than simply giving advance notice.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman read that wrong—he means bear garden.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kindly intervention.

I shall now move on to the matter of extra-parliamentary accountability, and the many institutions that have been taken away from us and which are no longer accountable to us through Ministers. The growth of quangos under the Government has been dramatic.

Mr. Skinner: There are 7,000.

Mr. Tyler: There are 5,521 quangos, but, as the hon. Gentleman says, if one adds the next steps agencies the total rises to 7,000. In 1993, those quangos spent £50 billion of taxpayers' money without our having the opportunity to bring them to book here in the House. Parliament's opportunities to question them are very limited and our ability, even in Select Committees, to ensure that they are answerable is very constricted by the Osmotherly rules. The hiving off of those many unaccountable organisations is an affront to the effective parliamentary democracy of this country. I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, so I will cite just one example of such behaviour.

A few months ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Further and Higher Education to intervene in a dispute over contracts of employment at the City of Bath college of further education. The Minister said that he could not do so. The Further Education Funding Council said that it had no power to intervene and the college governors said that they had delegated responsibility for such matters to the college principal. On the very same day that the Minister said that he could not intervene, however, he announced that he would hold back £50 million from further education colleges nationwide if they did not establish new, more flexible staff contracts. What bunkum it is when Ministers pretend that they cannot intervene.

In most cases, all too often Ministers dip in and out of controversies, simply to suit themselves. Awkward questions about the practical implications of their policy decisions are often sideswiped to agency heads. Witness what has happened to the Child Support Agency. It is surely objectionable that Secretaries of State have sub-contracted state responsibilities for prisons, higher education and social security benefits.

A veil has been placed between Parliament and those who are responsible for public services. I believe that the next steps agencies should be put on a statutory basis so that we in Parliament know where we stand in relation to them and can bring them back under parliamentary control.

As for the examination, criticism and approval of legislation, Parliament is still passing far too much legislation and even more speedily than it did in 1974, when I was previously a Member of the House. The speed at which legislation is considered has been a source of criticism for many years, but the pace is accelerating. Although the House spends about one third of its total time considering Government legislation, there is little effective scrutiny of Bills. All too often, they are considered in a hasty, excessively partisan and sloppy manner. For a variety of reasons, including partisanship, lack of resources and insufficient technical expertise, Standing Committees do not always scrutinise Bills properly. In performing our legislative role, Parliament has not done itself justice in the eyes of the public.

I believe that it would be better if, pre-legislation, Select Committees were empowered to instigate consultation and examination of legislation rather than for that to be left, always, to White Papers and departmental trawls, which the Government have conspicuously failed to make effective.

I will cite, briefly, three examples of poor legislative work. On the Railways Bill, the Government produced a huge number of amendments on the day that they were due to be debated. Once those amendments had been pulled apart, they were withdrawn, but further amendments were tabled at the eleventh hour. Therefore, once that Bill had received Royal Assent, a supplementary Bill had to be introduced to tidy up the mistakes. The Criminal Justice Bill of 1993 required about 100 Government amendments and some parts of it were not even capable of being enacted.

The House spent hours debating the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, the Maastricht Bill, but that time could easily have been halved if there had been prior agreement on the length of debate on each group of amendments. Existing procedures allowed for lengthy filibustering, which was meaningless because it was virtually impossible to amend the Bill. The majority of amendments selected for debate were either wrecking or probing ones. During the Committee and Report stages, there were 24 closures, which meant that about six hours were wasted while hon. Members went through the Lobby. The delaying tactic of "motion to report progress" was used on three occasions.

The Committee stage of the Bill took 163 hours over 23 days, and more than 600 amendments were tabled. Yet the Foreign Secretary told the House that, in effect, the vital amendment No. 27 on the social chapter would have no legal impact whether it was passed or not. What an extraordinary comment on our proceedings.

Few outside observers believe that we are too scrupulous in our examination of legislation, yet the Government curtail Parliament's consideration of important Bills by using the guillotine procedure. In December, the Government took two Bills through all their stages in just two days. We need to change Parliament's procedures so that there is more time for the scrutiny of legislation. We need to give Select Committees a greater role in preparing legislation for the House.

A matter of further concern is the increased use of, and scope for, statutory instruments. In 1993, there were 3,276 statutory instruments—two thirds more than 10 years ago.

Four statutory instruments are now in force for each statute. What degree of scrutiny does the House exercise when fewer than a quarter of Prayers are debated and about a third of statutory instruments are not subject to parliamentary procedures? Statutory instruments are growing like Topsy. Even when they are debated, they are not fully scrutinised in Committee. It should be possible to move amendments within the rules of debate. The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has drawn attention to the way in which those devices are used increasingly for political ends rather than for legislative means. That must be reversed.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill, on which other hon. Members may wish to speak, takes the matter a stage further with the so-called Henry VIII clauses. The 1932 report of the Donoughmore committee said that those would be used only in exceptional circumstances. They will now be used increasingly.

The Select Committee on Procedure was permitted to examine the best way to give some semblance of effective scrutiny to "fast track" procedure, but it was not allowed to consider whether there should be one at all. Of course, its limited recommendations fell foul of the Government Whips.

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) will no doubt speak about his Committee's recommendations and I shall not deal with those in detail at this stage. But is it not remarkable, if not deplorable, that the usual channels are currently carving up what was intended to be a report for the full House and Back-Bench Members in particular?

The domination of the party in British politics has been effectively analysed by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) in both his academic and practitioner roles. I hope, Madam Speaker, that he will catch your eye, because he can obviously develop his argument better than I.

Mr. Burns: He is not here.

Mr. Tyler: I am sure that his absence from this important debate will be brief. He sums up his case as follows:

"My argument, then, is that party substitutes for constitution in Britain (with party groups substituting for effective scrutiny) and that provides for a winner-takes-all kind of politics."

There is a deep-seated malaise in our Parliament and politics. The medieval jousting in this Chamber is as irrelevant to the real concerns of the British people as the mumbo-jumbo of our neo-Gothic rituals. Only the built-in self-interest of the cosy cartel, which Front-Bench Members are only too happy to maintain, as it monopolises power between two rival and alternating establishments, keeps it that way.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: In 1780, the House passed a motion that the power of the Crown—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has told the House that he is not prepared to give way, so hon. Members should not press him to do so.

Mr. Tyler: You will be glad to hear, Madam Speaker, that I am reaching my conclusion.

In 1780, the House passed a motion that

"The power of the Crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished."

If we mean business about parliamentary reform, we cannot simply deal with the symptoms—rowdy irrelevance at Question Time or impotent inquiries by Select Committees, for example. We must identify the root causes—the disease itself. We could do worse than start by agreeing that the power of the party has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished.

4.3 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates the Government for its initiative in setting up the Select Committee on Sittings of the House (the Jopling Committee); supports the objectives of making agreed improvements in the House's hours of sittings and working methods; and welcomes the Prime Minister's recent statement reaffirming the Government's commitment to progress on parliamentary reform.

I was surprised when the Liberal Democrats initially tabled this subject for discussion last Thursday because the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) was well aware that discussions were proceeding—I hope also to have discussions with him—about reforming the procedures of the House. Therefore, it is surprising that this subject should be chosen for debate today.

I was further puzzled when I discovered that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), rather than the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, was to lead the debate on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. My high regard for the judgment of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was momentarily increased still further in the early part of the speech of the hon. Member for North Cornwall, when I noticed that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire had left the Chamber, which seemed to me the most appropriate comment, although I realise that he came back. None of my puzzlement has been diminished by listening to the speech—

Madam Speaker: Order. I think I ought to correct the right hon. Gentleman. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) came to the Chair to have a word with me at that time.

Mr. Newton: In that case, I must straightforwardly apologise for misrepresenting the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. I realised that he had left his place. I obviously made a mistake in assuming that he had left the Chamber, but, having listened to the hon. Member for North Cornwall, I think that he would have been better off out of the Chamber had he done so.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for showing me the courtesy that, unfortunately, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who moved the motion, did not wish to show to others. Is not it an odd state of affairs when the hon. Gentleman who moved the motion is a Member who was in the House for about six months and then out for 18 years? If it is such a terrible place, why did he spend so many years trying to get back here?

Although I share many of the criticisms that the hon. Member for North Cornwall made of Government action—obviously I would do that—was not the essence of much of what he said that we should take the politics out of

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politics? This is a place for political warfare. If we did not have political warfare in a Parliament such as ours, which we should cherish, it would be out on the streets. There is nothing wrong with clashes. Much of what we heard—I think that the Leader of the House will agree—was pious nonsense.

Mr. Newton: I usually try to be emollient, but for once I find myself greatly in agreement with the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). He asked a pertinent question of the hon. Member for North Cornwall to which, no doubt, we shall in due course receive an answer—why he was so keen to get back in here if he thinks so little of the place. On the other hand, our track record in obtaining from the Liberal Democrats answers to any question is not good that may remain another one that hangs in the air.

It was, frankly—as I think will have been widely felt on both sides of the House—a pretty extraordinary performance. The hon. Member for North Cornwall made a speech in which, although I do not remember his exact words, he deplored the absence of proper debate in the House and then persistently refused intervention after intervention—interventions being one of the ways in which we conduct debate in the House, sometimes quite productively. He spoke of people evading issues; I have never heard a speech that evaded as many issues as his. There was only one thing in his remarks with which I totally agreed and I took a note of the sentence because it harnessed so much agreement in my mind. He said:

"I have only a limited number of things to say".

He could certainly say that again. He said them at some length and, in my judgment at least, his speech was little more than a series of cheap debating points.

In the remaining few minutes of a speech that started by expressing worry about Parliament's bad reputation, the hon. Member for North Cornwall did nothing to enhance the reputation of Parliament.

Mr. Burns: While my right hon. Friend is on the subject of enhancing the reputation of Parliament, did he notice that, during the speech of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) in which he criticised hon. Members of, I suspect, all parties in the Chamber for being egged on by the media, a phenomenon occurred that occurs only when Liberal Democrats make speeches? The Liberal Democrats all bunched behind one other on Benches belonging to the Labour party so as to achieve the "doughnut" effect for television. In other debates, when they are not taking part, they resume their normal Bench. They do that simply to get themselves on television and to give an impression that they are doing more work than they usually do.

Mr. Newton: I shall not follow my hon. Friend down that path, but no doubt his observations will have been noted in these and other quarters.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Did my right hon. Friend notice that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) condemned what he alleged to be typical answers from Ministers—answers such as "I will write to the hon. Gentleman"? The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is the only Liberal Member who answers questions, and he gave precisely that answer to a question from me today.

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) speaks for the House of Commons Commission. As I am a member of the Commission, I hesitate to attack him in that role. I see that he has had the grace to smile, in his usual engaging way, at the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold).

Let me return to what I consider to be the main issues in the minds of hon. Members on both sides of the House, who will no doubt wish to contribute to the debate. In my present capacity as Leader of the House, I am more than happy to engage in debates on procedure whenever the House wishes. Nevertheless—as I suggested in commenting on the existence of today's debate—I hope that I shall not be thought churlish if I express some surprise at its timing. As the House well knows, I am in the middle of discussions with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and others, seeking to make progress on procedural reform.

Those talks are taking place in an extremely constructive way, but—as with any other negotiation or series of talks—it would be neither practicable nor desirable to attempt to give a blow-by-blow account in the middle of them. I hope that the House will understand that at this stage I can only set out our principal objectives, and state—I mean this quite straightforwardly—that I shall be happy to listen to any further thoughts that are expressed today. I very much hope that that will give further impetus to the progress that hon. Members on both sides of the House want.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Leader of the House used the term "procedural change". Is he in a position to say when we can expect changes to the Standing Orders governing Scottish business? I am given to understand that discussions have taken place over many months, but have been halted.

Mr. Newton: I shall mention that later, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we hope that the new arrangements will be in place in time for the next Session of Parliament.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): The right hon. Gentleman was kind enough to suggest that he would accept whatever views were offered for consideration. May I bring up a very important aspect of what goes on in the House, which was not mentioned in that interesting schoolboy essay by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and has not so far been mentioned in the disconnected comments of the Leader of the House?

One of the most malign influences on how the public see the House of Commons has resulted from the introduction of those damned objects, the television cameras. It has led to the bad conduct of hon. Members —worse conduct than normal—and the bad conduct of business in the House. The cameras are frequently abused by the Government Front Bench, and some of the slimier Members, to get points of view across to the public which are misleading and are made only because the cameras are on them.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has made his views known over a long period. I have to say that I do not agree with him about the adverse effect on the procedures of the House—or, indeed, about the view that the public take of the introduction of television cameras. My personal view

—it can be no more than a personal view—is that it has significantly enhanced interest in what goes in this place, and therefore enhanced the centrality of Parliament to the British political process. That effect should be welcomed. I do not say that there have been no undesirable side-effects, but overall I think that the move has been beneficial.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that—contrary to what has just been said by my dear, beloved hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds)—it is not true that behaviour in this place has deteriorated since the advent of television cameras? In fact it has improved, as has the dress of many hon. Members. If the cameras were withdrawn, would there not be a public outcry?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's latter point is true. As it happens, I also agreed with his first point; it is simply that I did not wish to pick a dispute with the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) on each and every one of his points. However, I made it quite clear that I did not agree with him.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Newton: I will, but from the large number of hon. Members present I judge that many would like to take part in the debate. I have said that, in present circumstances, I am not in a position to make a major, substantive statement about any changes and I do not want to take up too much of the time of the House. While I am ready, as ever, to give way to interventions, it will significantly prolong my speech if I continue to do so.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My right hon. Friend referred to the public's interest in this place. They must find many of our proceedings somewhat arcane. Were we to timetable a greater proportion of our business, not only would they have a greater understand of what is happening but they would have greater opportunity to come to hear what we say, both in the Chamber and in Committee.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend made that same point crisply and effectively during questions to the Lord President of the Council a little earlier today. I understand that that aim—expressed, in one way, in the Jopling report—would be supported by many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Before I make what I intend to be fairly brief comments, I want to inform the House of the regret expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, that, because of the short notice of the debate and his long-standing commitment in an equally important parliamentary capacity, he cannot be present today. He wanted me to pass on his regrets, which he expressed both to me and to the hon. Member for North Cornwall.

The starting point of our discussion is the report known in the shorthand of the trade as the Jopling report—the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, which was chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who may be seeking to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. As on earlier occasions, I pay tribute not only to him but to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), now the Secretary of State for Transport. His appreciation of the need for reform of our pattern of sittings led to the setting up of the Committee.

When the House last debated the matter, which was some time ago, I made it clear that the Government would welcome the more civilised, more certain hours of sitting that the Committee recommended, provided that that could be done in a way that ensured that the elected Government of the day could get their legislative programme and other essential business through in a reasonable fashion. That remains our position. Since then, my goal has been a package of measures that strikes a fair balance between the interests of Government, the interests of the Opposition and, of course, the interests of the House as a whole.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Before the Government reach a conclusion on these matters—especially on the handling of legislation—will the right hon. Gentleman deal specifically with the arguments deployed by the all-party Hansard Society committee on the legislative process, chaired by Lord Rippon, which demonstrated authoritatively how unsatisfactory our processes are for the public in producing good quality legislation? That is due not in small measure to the amount of time wasting in dealing with legislation, to which my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) referred.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also deal specifically with the question raised by Sir Thomas Bingham, the Master of the Rolls, in his Denning lecture, about the inadequate amount of time being given by Parliament and the Government to the recommendations of the Law Commission, fewer and fewer of which are being acted upon by the House? Instead, they are lying collecting dust on the shelves, not because they are not worthy, but because the Government cannot find the time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. This is a very long intervention.

Mr. Newton: I have two brief observations to make on that intervention. First, there is quite an amount in the report of the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government—although I accept that it goes wider—which interrelates with the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale put forward in his report on the way in which the House approaches legislation and the discussion of legislation. Secondly, for what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland shorthanded as Law Commission Bills or law reform Bills, procedures already exist in both Houses of Parliament. In this House, there is the provision, for example, for some legislation to go to Second Reading Committees, which are designed to facilitate the passage of legislation when it is non-controversial. I better openly say that it was more difficult to operate those procedures during the period when the usual channels were not operating. I am hopeful that, now we are back to a more normal pattern of relationships between the two Front Benches, some of those difficulties may ease.

The overall objective that we all have was well put by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in a press conference that he held a week ago today, when he said:

"I hope we can find ways of enabling the Commons to do its business in more sensible ways, in more sensible hours without either unacceptably reducing the government's capacity to carry its programme, or reducing the Opposition's flexibility in deploying and pressing its case against government legislation. I

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believe that this effort has very strong support on both sides of the House and very strong support outside the House from millions of people who follow our proceedings. The government is keen to make progress on this front, if the Opposition are equally keen".

I see no reason to doubt that they are. He continued:

"I hope we should be able to map the way forward before the summer recess."

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I shall, but I must cease to give way quite so frequently if other hon. Members are to have a chance to speak.

Mr. Flynn: In support of that statement by the Prime Minister, I gave him 24 hours notice last week of a question that I asked in an entirely non-combative way. The answer that I received was described in *The Times* editorial as being a typical civil service briefing with a party-political jibe in the tail. If the Prime Minister is failing to rise to his own challenge, why should the House take him seriously?

Mr. Newton: Frankly, that is a cheap debating point rivalling the comments that we heard from the hon. Member for North Cornwall. Of course I was aware of, and had seen, the hon. Gentleman's letter to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister setting out his question. I heard the reply. I thought that it was a properly considered reply and that my right hon. Friend responded in the way in which the hon. Gentleman had made possible and I cleave to that view.

In the last debate on the report of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, he made a comment with which I very much agree. He said:

"when considering altering parliamentary procedure, it is important to seek to do it on the basis of consensus."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1992; Vol. 205, c. 74.]

That is very much the spirit in which I am conducting my current discussions and in which they are being conducted in other quarters as well. Since the usual channels have resumed, we have made good progress towards that objective and I hope that I shall also be able to have constructive discussions with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Our aim, as I have said, is to be able to map the way forward before the summer recess and I shall give further indications on what we may be able to achieve as soon as I am able.

However, I should like to underline something that I said either in response to an intervention or in response to one of the questions at Lord President's questions a few moments ago. I hope that the House will not underestimate the extent to which considerable progress has been made towards some of the objectives in the Jopling report in the management of this Session's business. Excluding Consolidated Fund debates, which are, of course, effectively private Members' time, we have sat after midnight on only 17 occasions out of 116. The longest sitting lasted until 3.22 am and only one other sitting went beyond 3 am. I think that the hon. Member for North Cornwall will agree, given his previous experience in this place, that the almost routine all-night marathons of the 1970s and the early part of the 1980s have effectively become things of the past. We sit to those hours, or all night, far less frequently than was the case when I became a Member 20 years ago.

We have tried to arrange less contentious business—this is much in line with one of the Jopling recommendations—for Thursday evenings to facilitate the passage back to their constituencies of Members from further afield who wish to be in their constituencies on Friday.

I have sought to give Members as much notice as possible of the dates of recesses.

Mr. Tony Banks: What about the summer recess?

Several hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Newton: I understand the general interest in the summer recess. I am not in a position to be as forthcoming as I should like about that. I am conscious that on a couple of occasions I have given so much advance notice of the dates of other recesses that they have been overlooked and complaints have been made, when in fact the dates have been announced long since. On those occasions, some hon. Members were still unaware of the dates. We have, however, made some progress.

In short, even within the present procedural rules, an approach to business management has been taken that has represented a deliberate wish to be responsive to the wishes of the House. That approach has already enabled us to make useful progress towards meeting those wishes. In doing so—I think that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East will agree with me—we have created a useful foundation on which we may be able to make further progress, which is precisely what we are seeking to do.

Given the time that has been taken by interventions, I shall not spend a great deal of time commenting on other recent reforms. I hope, however, that the House will not underestimate them. I have in mind the development of the European Standing Committees, which has helped to relieve the pressure of business on the Floor of the House. The volume of private business has been substantially reduced by the passage of the Transport and Works Act 1992.

In this Parliament, the system of departmental Select Committees—it has been referred to already, but the extent to which Committees have improved the capacity of the House to hold the Executive to account has perhaps not been acknowledged—has been consolidated and extended. It is with some considerable pleasure that I find myself the Leader of the House who has extended the Select Committee system to Northern Ireland affairs and has achieved the establishment, after a long period of controversy, of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I pay tribute to the efforts that the Leader of the House has made. Will he be prepared to allow both the European Standing Committees and the Select Committees to have greater rights so that they can move amendments to the legislation that they are monitoring and can demand that it be fully debated on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Newton: It is always open to Committees to make proposals about debates on the Floor of the House. We always consider such proposals with great care.

I promised the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that I would respond to his

intervention and I shall do so before I resume my place. There are one or two further procedural developments that I hope to bring before the House in the near future.

In February, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland published the Government's proposals for improvements in the way in which we handle Scottish business. The aim, as I think I explained earlier—my right hon. Friend and I hope to bring forward the proposals shortly—is to give Scottish Members additional opportunities to raise Scottish concerns without in any way diminishing their rights to debate Scottish issues on the Floor of the House.

Under the proposals, the Scottish Grand Committee will be able to deal with a wide range of business, including the Second Reading of Bills, questions to Scottish Office Ministers, a new procedure for short debates, ministerial statements and general debates on topics chosen by the Government, the Official Opposition or by the minority parties. We envisage that the Scottish Grand Committee will hold some of its meetings in Scotland, not only in Edinburgh but in other parts of that country, provided that the necessary facilities are available. As I have said, it is our intention that those reforms should take effect at the beginning of the next Session.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Has any more thought been given to the critical question whether the head of the Crown Office, the Lord Advocate, can be subjected to direct questioning by Members of this House? For that matter, has any more thought been given to whether the Minister of State, Scottish Office, who plays a very active, critical and controversial part in the affairs of Scotland, could also be subject to questioning by Members of the House of Commons?

Mr. Newton: As I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, he raised those matters in a point of order towards the end of last week. I hope that he will not mind my saying that he also spoke to me informally afterwards about his concerns, and I undertook to look further into the points that he had raised. I will do that, but I hope that he will understand that I cannot respond further across the Dispatch Box this afternoon.

There is really only one other point to which I want to refer, which may introduce slightly more controversy and on which some hon. Members may wish to comment. With regard to procedural reform or change, we have proposals for a new procedure for dealing with deregulation orders once the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill has been enacted.

The House has already debated the Procedure Committee's valuable report on that subject. I am not quite sure whether I understood the references of the hon. Member for North Cornwall to that point, because the Government have accepted virtually all the Procedure Committee's recommendations in that area, as the Chairman of that Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton very fairly acknowledged.

The procedure will involve—this point relates to a number of strands in the debate—widespread public consultation before a proposal is brought forward and scrutiny by an all-party Select Committee with powers to take evidence from witnesses and to report its conclusions to the House. That will ensure that some useful but non-contentious deregulation measures can be enacted with full public and parliamentary scrutiny, but without adding still further to the pressure on the Floor of the House which is one of the things that so many hon. Members wish to see reduced.

I realise that, with respect to the main issue on people's minds, I have been able to do little more this afternoon than to say that I continue to listen against a background of continuing discussion. However, I look forward to the rest of the debate and to the comments that others will make. I hope that this debate will give a further impetus to the reform which I am sure is widely supported on both sides of the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I say that there is a great deal of interest in the debate, but only about two hours before the winding-up speeches must start. I appeal for short speeches.

4.32 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I will certainly try to be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In opening the debate, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) suggested a reform which does not seem to have occurred to the Jopling Committee. The hon. Gentleman suggested that we could enhance our public reputation by redesigning the building. He suggested that we should sit around in a semicircle, rather than in this adversarial setting, perhaps on bean bags—*[Interruption.]* That would enable me to sit beside the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) and I would like that very much. However, it would make no difference to the political differences between us.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall went on to describe his parliamentary colleagues as lazy, badly behaved and self-indulgent. I do not have the hon. Gentleman's experience of the Liberal Democratic parliamentary group, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that he may be on to something.

Mr. Tyler: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I want to put on record the fact that I was talking about the view of the public as displayed by a MORI public opinion poll. It was not my view.

Mr. Brown: I am perfectly willing to accept from the hon. Gentleman that that is the public's view of the Liberal Democratic parliamentary group and it is fair to say that the recent election results rather bear that out.

Not unusually for the Liberal Democrats, the motion confuses two different issues right at the beginning and then carries on in a similar muddled vein. It is true that the Government are unpopular. However, the Liberal Democratic motion confuses that with public contempt for the institution of Parliament. Dissatisfaction with the Executive and the Executive's decisions is not the same as disenchantment with parliamentary democracy. There is no widespread demand in this country for another form of government—not communism, not government by workers' soviet, not military rule, not fascist dictatorship, not even a change in the election system to give the Liberal Democrats a permanent veto over the decisions of Conservative or Labour Governments.

The motion goes on to criticise the organisation and procedures of the House. Of course, there is a very strong case for reform, although it is not made out in the motion, which does not contain a single constructive suggestion. In

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fact, the Jopling report contains a number of constructive suggestions and discussions are taking place in the normal way with a view to making progress on the Jopling recommendations and other ideas that sit logically alongside them. I am not in a position today to state the view of the parliamentary Labour party; nor is it right that I should.

Mr. Tony Banks: I take my hon. Friend back slightly to the layout of the Chamber. Is it not a fact that if 650 people were chosen at random—indeed, looking around the Chamber, perhaps they were—and put in this place, because of the confrontational nature of the layout, they would behave in precisely the same way as hon. Members behave during Prime Minister's Question Time? Would not it be appropriate to look at the layout of the Chamber and do something about the appalling lack of facilities for Members? Why cannot we have individual desks so that we could speak from them, rather than stand in this rudimentary, confrontational Chamber which exacerbates feelings in this place?

Mr. Brown: I have not given great thought to the positioning of furniture in the building. I am a bit of a traditionalist; I rather like the Chamber as it is. Just about the only chance of securing a parliamentary majority for the Liberal Democrats would be if hon. Members were chosen entirely at random. I do not see any other prospect of their gaining very much success.

Before making further progress, it is absolutely right to thank the Lord President of the Council for the efficient and constructive way in which he is undertaking the task of reform. In particular, I thank him for his courtesy in the discussions on the detail of the proposals. I hope that we will have something of substance to put in front of the House soon and then we will be in a position to hear the views of the House. Not all those matters are adversarial between the parties; indeed, some are neutral. It is a matter of preference for the House rather than party political advantage.

It is perfectly reasonable, for example, for Members of Parliament to want some certainty in allocating time for constituency business and other work that cannot be done in the House itself. It is also perfectly reasonable that Members of Parliament should like as much notice of business as can reasonably be provided. It also seems to me to be perfectly possible to bring about evolutionary change in the way in which we carry out our business in the House. Such change should be brought about by consensus.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is not my hon. Friend falling into the chasm of accepting the basic premise which operates in this place: that the Executive controls the timetable of Parliament? I think that that is wrong. The debate is about fundamental reform whereby control of the business of this place is repatriated to hon. Members rather than left with the Executive. It should be left to a Select Committee of distinguished parliamentarians who are not members of the Government. That is the basis of reform and many good things could flow from it.

Mr. Brown: I do not want to become involved in the details of the discussion, because they are not complete and there are matters still to be resolved between us before we put proposals to other colleagues. However, there is absolutely no chance whatsoever of my falling into a parliamentary chasm, because I always send somebody from the Whips Office to walk in front of me.

Change should be by consensus. It should not, as the Leader of the House has confirmed, disturb the existing balance between the rights of the Executive and the rights of the House—between Government and Opposition. The Liberal Democrat demand for immediate action goes very close to being a demand for the Executive to impose their version of change and reform on the House, whether hon. Members like it or not. That would be foolish. We should proceed by consensus and not by encouraging the Executive to impose their view on us.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I am pleased to see taking part in the debate.

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand that we need to proceed by consensus and that no one can impose solutions over people's heads, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that there will come a time when unanimity will not be possible, particularly among Labour Back Benchers, and that he will then have to use his best offices to persuade them of the need to change, even it means that some of them will be disappointed?

Mr. Brown: I made it overwhelmingly clear that I support the case for reform and for consulting other people, among whom I would include the hon. Gentleman. We must proceed by consensus among the different political parties. People will always disagree on some points, but we shall have to find a way of resolving them. That should not strike any politician as being unusual or impossible to achieve. The Government and the parliamentary Labour party want to proceed in a way that is reasonable and sensible, probably not least because both see the realistic prospect of our roles being reversed, which is more than one can say about the Liberal Democrats.

I should like to put in a word for the idea of non-adversarial examination of technical legislation: the annual Finance Bill, omnibus law reform, home affairs measures—perhaps building on the work of the Law Commission—and detailed Department of the Environment legislation. The idea, which has been canvassed before, is that technical parts of, for example, the Finance Bill could be separated from the rest of the Bill. Detailed measures could be dealt with under a separate Taxes Management Bill, which could be scrutinised in the same way as we scrutinise European legislation. It would require a larger gap between Second Reading and Committee stage, and as a quid pro quo the Bill would have to be passed on a tighter and, let me say it now, agreed timetable.

I accept that that is not the Government's view. Such a policy, however, would improve parliamentary scrutiny, enable Members of Parliament other than Ministers to hear expert opinion and enhance our standing with specialists who would like to explain their position to us.

I am not suggesting such a procedure for matters that are politically contentious between the two parties. The proposal would deal with technical matters, on which any reasonable person would like to hear the views of specialists before coming to a final conclusion.

There are other obvious areas for reform. More effective use could be made of scrutiny by Committee. If we are seeking to gain constituency time, the proposal to do the House's Friday work on Wednesday mornings merits consideration. The proposal has no balance of advantage between Government and Opposition, although other people will no doubt disagree. Obviously, it is essential that we protect the credibility and reputation of Parliament and that we focus our energies on real issues rather than waste time for its own sake in a boring and anarchic way. It is surprising that some hon. Members, who claim to be the most radical, are among those most opposed to change.

The Liberal Democrat motion rightly refers to the Government's

"systematic erosion of Parliament's role in the consideration of legislation".

The most blatant example of that was the way in which the increase in employees' national insurance contributions and the changes to the statutory sick pay regime were bludgeoned through the House before Christmas. As a result of that heavy-handed action, the Labour party broke off normal relations with the Government. By contrast, the Liberal Democrats condemned the Government's actions yet carried on conducting business in the normal way. They complain about Government action, but offer no effective opposition.

Similarly, the Government guillotined the Finance Bill very tightly, allowing for a range of abuses, including slipping in amendments at the last minute under the name of Tory Back Benchers. They manipulated the guillotine to avoid Ministers having to explain tricky matters to the Committee. Tory Members filibustered debates prior to those that would be awkward to the Executive, thereby ensuring that controversial issues were not discussed in Committee, particularly the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel, which was almost not discussed at all.

At the end of that farce, the Liberal Democrat spokesman felt able to tell the House that he broadly approved of the way in which the Committee had proceeded to the guillotine. The views of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) are at variance with the contents of the motion.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend agree that the disgraceful way in which the Government used their majority to timetable those measures offers a salutary warning to those who believe that timetabling should be more frequently and routinely used in the House?

Mr. Brown: The lessons to be learnt from the way in which the Finance Bill was treated in Committee this year were not lost on me, of all people in this place, and are conditioning the current discussions. My hon. Friend's warning is well taken. It is not possible for the Opposition somehow to sacrifice their rights and hand over the management of business to the Executive.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: Of course I will: how could I possibly resist?

Mr. Beith: Has the hon. Gentleman talked to any of the many groups that watched the passage of the Finance Bill with particular interest because they are affected by it and have to implement it? Is he aware of the extent to which they found that the timetable made it much more feasible for them to deal with hon. Members because they knew when amendments were to be debated? Will he recognise that my comment that the timetable for the Bill had, in general, worked, which I stand by, was qualified only by my assertion that the ability of other groups to vary the operation of the timetable would have improved it further still—a factor which is inherent in the Jopling proposals?

Mr. Brown: I have in front of me what the right hon. Gentleman said in the debate on 20 April 1994. He did not make that latter point, although I appreciate that it is his view. He is a veteran of many Finance Bills. He is right to say that there should be certainty about the timetable so that the outside world can make specialist representations. I know that he shares my view that the best way to deal with the matter is to have a separate Taxes Management Bill dealing with the details of long, omnibus Bills point by point and measure by measure so that experts from outside can talk to us and explain their views.

That does not mean that I yield one inch on the way in which Parliament handles controversial matters such as tax increases or decreases—tax decreases before elections and spectacular increases after elections. Those matters are politically contentious and it is no use suggesting that they can be dealt with by consensus, because they cannot. People have strong views about such matters. It would better serve democracy if we first took expert testimony on finance, home affairs and Department of the Environment measures and proceeded in a less adversarial way.

The Liberals' motion makes some complaints about civil service involvement in political activity. I agree with the points that it makes. It is important that the public service remains independent and uncorrupted. Britain had a strong tradition of independent public service, which prolonged government by a single party has eroded. A letter from Mr. Bob Welsh to the social services inspectorate in the Department of Health states:

"A continuing flow of positive messages about community care would pay political dividends at both local and national levels".

That clearly oversteps the mark for a public servant. Nor do I think that it is proper to use parliamentary draftsmen to draw up copious amendments for Government Back Benchers to table to private Member's legislation, which the Government then pretend they do not oppose in principle.

There is a case for reform, including reconsidering the procedure for Prime Minister's Question Time. The inescapable fact, however, is that the job of being a Member of Parliament will always be demanding and is likely to become more, rather than less, so. No reform of the House will ever get around that fact.

We would also betray our responsibilities to the British people if we ever let Parliament become a part-time institution, relieving the Executive of the burden of scrutiny. I must tell the Liberal Democrats that no amount of neogothic self-righteous whingeing will ever change either of those facts.

4.49 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that he had taken note of a certain phrase in the opening speech from the Liberal Democrat Benches, in which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said that he had "relatively few things to say". I also wrote that comment

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down, and it occurred to me at the time that the hon. Gentleman might well have said that he had relatively few things in his head.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that he does not like the cut and thrust of our proceedings in this House, which has gone on for centuries, and wants to turn this place into a hemicycle to try to dampen everything down. If he sat and watched the proceedings of the United States Congress, a forum which is based very much on that approach, he would find that Members of Congress largely complain about the boring blandness of the Chamber and about the fact that all the real work goes on in Committee. I cannot think of a worse fate for this House than to be consigned to that sort of blandness.

We repeatedly hear from hon. Members such as the hon. Member for North Cornwall of their dislike for political cut and thrust. We should never forget that there are still millions of people around the world who would give their back teeth for the cut and thrust of our debates and for the democracy that we enjoy. I am sorry to say this, but it seems that many hon. Members on the Liberal Democrat Benches—and there are some here today who are distinguished exclusions from what I am about to say—seem to prefer the political actions of a dark night with a stiletto to the cut and thrust that is so much a part of our proceedings.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that as we have an adversarial Chamber, anyone who is elected to the House must decide which side they are on, and that such a decision does not come easily to many Liberal Democrats?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend could not have put it better.

I welcome this debate and the Liberal Democrat motion for one reason: it allows us again to discuss the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, of which I had the honour to be Chairman. We have not debated the report for two years. I shall come back to that in a moment; first, however, I simply want to say a little more about the motion that we are debating.

When I first read the motion, it seemed to be a rushed job. It was not well drafted and little thought had gone into it. That became clear in my mind when I received a note from my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, to which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House referred. It was a note that my right hon. Friend had written to the hon. Member for North Cornwall in which he says —I have his permission to quote it—

"I am sorry that when you had a word with me on Wednesday evening you did not mention the intention of your party to be arranging the debate."

I will not accuse the hon. Gentleman. I cannot believe that—

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Jopling: I shall give way in a moment. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman did that out of discourtesy or deviousness—I grant him that. All I can say is that that demonstrates that his is a rushed, botched-up motion which should be thrown out on its ear.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am sure that he will be aware that the date for this debate was offered to the Liberal Democrats only on Wednesday. It was therefore impossible for my hon. Friends and me to indicate to the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, for whom I have a high regard, the intention to debate this issue.

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman forgets that for many years I was part of the usual channels. Of course, the Liberal Democrats have always known broadly when they would get debates.

Mr. Tyler: That is not true.

Mr. Jopling: Not exactly when, but within a few weeks.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman did not give way to us.

Mr. Jopling: I will not repeat the points made by my hon. Friends.

In my experience, the Liberal Democrats always know within a few weeks that they are to be offered a half-day debate, and they always have a motion thought out and ready. Perhaps they do not think ahead as they used to.

One part of the motion that demonstrates that it is a botched-up job is the reference to Prime Minister's Question Time. If ever there was a time not to table a motion criticising the format, this is it. Anyone can criticise the format of Prime Minister's Question Time; for many years, it has occupied better minds than those of hon. Members here today and no one has ever been able to come up with a better way of doing things. Let us hope that we can find one. It does not take a genius to criticise the present arrangement for Prime Minister's Question Time. But, given that things are at last—and helpfully, I hope —moving, this seems to me to be the most stupid time at which to criticise the format.

Mr. Dalyell: There was a very different time in the history of Prime Minister's Questions—the time when the Prime Minister of the day would transfer any matter that was not directly relevant to the job of Prime Minister. The absolutely horrendous open question puts a completely different complexion on Prime Minister's Question Time. The two are as different as chalk and cheese.

Mr. Jopling: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who has been in the House marginally longer than I have, will agree that, if we can find a better way of running Prime Minister's Question Time, we should do it. I welcome the initiative of the Procedure Committee, which has gone some way towards that.

Mr. Winnick Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jopling: No, I shall proceed.

Another thing that surprised me about the motion was its attack on Parliament's

"ability to hold the Executive to account".

As the motion says that, some credit should be given to the departmental Select Committees which were set up in 1980. As the House may remember—although my old friend Norman St. John-Stevas claims that he set them up —I undertook all the negotiations for setting up the Select Committees with the then Opposition Chief Whip.

I believe that the Select Committees have dramatically changed the ability of the House to question the Executive. As the House knows, I am a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee so I have some practical experience of this. I was also a member of two Select Committees—the Agriculture Committee and the Science and Technology Committee—during the famous Crossman experiment. I was sorry that they did not survive, but I am, and continue to be, a strong advocate of the Select Committee system.

I also have the advantage of having had to sit on the sharp end of the Select Committees; as a departmental Minister, I was frequently cross-examined very hard by them. They have made a dramatic change to the preparation that Ministers undertake before they face the House. Any Minister who has had to sit in front of a Select Committee and be cross-examined will know that it is something that no previous Ministers before the early 1980s ever had to do.

Mr. Winnick: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has given way on several occasions. Does he agree that, although the departmental Select Committees undoubtedly do excellent work, the Chamber must be the daily focus when we are sitting of the differences between the political parties, and that Prime Minister's Question Time, whatever its format, is bound to be the subject of intense controversy and the time at which the most controversial subjects are raised? There is no reason why we should apologise for the fact that hon. Members on both sides of the House raise matters that we believe are of the greatest importance, or for the fact that there is some noise. Would not it also be useful if the serious newspapers reported parliamentary proceedings, not simply Prime Minister's Question Time?

Mr. Jopling: I am delighted for the first time in my life publicly to support everything that the hon. Gentleman has said. He and I have been in the House many years. I agree with what he said—indeed, I referred to that point a little earlier when I said that I hoped that we would not move to the bland American experience, which does not match the cut and thrust of our parliamentary proceedings.

It occurred to me that in his arguments about the problems of Parliament in getting facts and information, the hon. Member for North Cornwall ought logically to have advocated a freedom of information Bill. I did not hear him expound that argument, although it seemed to be at the centre of what he was trying to say. He referred to the Pergau affair. I do not want to say too much about it as a member of the Select Committee which is currently examining the matter and preparing a report. The hon. Gentleman referred to a temporary entanglement. I make the point to him that the moment that Ministers discovered that there was a temporary entanglement, strenuous and in some ways rather harsh steps were taken to get rid of it, which reflected nothing but credit on the Government. It was clear that an entanglement had been arrived at which ought not to have happened.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): The right hon. Gentleman has provoked me with his references to freedom of information and the work of the Committee to which he belongs. Only today, I listened to a discussion on the radio about a prison which is due to open in my constituency. All kinds of revelations are common knowledge in the United States and these reports have been published about the prison, but the Home Office refuses to divulge in this country any of the information that is available to the public in the United States. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will have a look at that example.

Mr. Jopling: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman's local newspapers will have heard what he has said. I cannot comment on it. I have no doubt that his local radio and television stations will at this moment be agog and will make sure that his intervention is recorded in the 6 o'clock news.

Let me make just a few comments about the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House. First, history: a unanimous report was published by a Committee representing the three principal parties. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was a most distinguished member of that Committee. There was a debate in the House before the last election in which broad support was expressed for the unanimous recommendation.

Shortly after the election, an early-day motion was signed by 215 Members. I think that I speak reasonably accurately when I say that 120 of them or thereabouts were Opposition Members. We had another debate in July 1992. The current Leader of the House accepted about 85 per cent. of what the Committee had recommended. That was the high water point. Since then, the report has made little progress. I think that everyone in the House knows that the block to its progress comes from a small number of Members. I think that the Opposition Whips Office is one of those areas in which there is a small redoubt of opposition to the report. I shall not say any more about that because I really do not want to muddy the waters at this stage.

Since our debate in the summer of 1992, the Government could easily have ramrodded the findings of the report through the House. I know from being around the House during the past two years that there is broad support for the recommendations right across the House. There is no week in the House when I do not have three or four Members from each side asking me, "When will the recommendations of your Committee be accepted by the House?"

The Government could perfectly well have ramrodded the report through, but they have not done so. Because they have not done so, they have been subjected to the short-term criticism to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall treated us today. I hope that the Government will stick to the policies that the Leader of the House expounded today. My right hon. Friend can be perfectly sure that, if he had ramrodded the proposals through the House, the same Liberal Democrat Members would have talked about a travesty of democracy. We know their tactics. That is what they would have done.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will know that during the past two years I have used whatever influence I have to do my utmost to prevent the Government from ramrodding the proposals through the House. I have consistently appealed to my right hon. Friend privately not to ramrod them through. I am sure that that has been right.

Like a few other people here, I was a Member of the House during the Crossman experiment that began when Richard Crossman was Leader of the House from 1966. The proposals that Richard Crossman made never had a broad consensus. As a result, they were made to be unworkable. The Select Committee on Sittings of the

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House always knew that. I think that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed will bear me out when I say that often during the deliberations of that Select Committee, we discussed the Crossman experience and agreed that we should go for a broad consensus if we wanted the recommendations to stick. Of course, one can never get unanimity. I have forgotten which member of the Committee referred to the need for unanimity. I think that it was the Liberal Chief Whip. He rightly made the point that one could never could get unanimity on such matters. However, one has to get as close to unanimity as possible. It is essential to get that broad support.

Mr. Dalyell: Just to be fair, as the late Dick Crossman's Parliamentary Private Secretary, may I remind the right hon. Gentleman that distinguished Members on both sides of the House said one thing and then changed their minds? If the shade of Iain Macleod were here, he would confess to that.

Mr. Jopling: I have no recollection, because I was an extremely junior Member in those days, of whether that was true of the discussions and agreements that took place before the proposals were introduced. I do know, however, that right across the Opposition Back Benches there was a dislike of the proposals—although I accept that those on the Front Bench accepted it.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Will my right hon. Friend allow me to intervene?

Mr. Jopling: This must be the last time that I give way.

Sir Dudley Smith: I intervene as one of the less distinguished people who were here at that time—as opposed to the powers that be, to whom the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred. The proposal was disliked by Members of all parties. The morning sittings failed because people on both sides of the House did not turn up and do their job.

Mr. Jopling: That may well be right. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment, but I shall not give way any more; I have given way a great deal and I must finish.

The Select Committee's report was balanced. We sought to balance the interests of Government and Opposition and I still believe that the recommendations did that. I have never fully understood why a few hon. Members oppose the proposals. I think that the main opposition is to the timetabling of Bills, but I remind the House that the Select Committee was not specific about that. The Select Committee said that we ought to discuss further how timetabling should be introduced and referred to the Select Committee on Procedure report of 1986.

If the Opposition do not like timetabling, let us not forget that the Government could implement the rest of the report's recommendations perfectly well without it, because they already have huge powers to introduce timetabling if they so desire. In the days when I was Chief Whip, I was very anxious that the Government should never exceed Michael Foot's famous record for timetabling—I think it was five timetable motions in a day. In the early 1980s, I tried my best to ensure that the Government never exceeded that record for guillotines. Since then, there have been many of them and no doubt the House is moving, to a much greater extent, towards accepting them. But timetabling of Bills could be left out, as the Government would still have all those powers.

Leaving aside some of the shortcomings of this debate, I welcome the opportunity to give a push to some of the report's recommendations. The House has demonstrated considerable patience by trying to wait for a move towards a broad consensus and I hope that that moment has now arrived. I only hope that the present talks will make all our patience entirely worth while.

5.11 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I have frequently heard the Labour Whips' Office referred to by colourful names but redoubt is not one of them. If I appear to be picking up on some of the supposed objections to some aspects of our parliamentary procedure, I hope that I shall be acquitted of doing so on behalf of those venerable ladies and gentlemen, most of whom I get on with very well, but very few of whom would suggest that I spoke on their behalf.

The procedure of the House of Commons is an esoteric subject, on which Members frequently hold forth when they have astonishingly little knowledge of how it actually works. Recently, I was honoured to be asked to go to Kenya to talk about parliamentary procedure. The Clerk of one of our Commonwealth Parliaments was holding forth at great length, partly because he had toothache, about the need for Members of Parliament to understand procedure. He said that it should not be possible for people to become Members of Parliament unless they understood it. I was asked to comment and said that I was sure that that ought to be the way, but that it would rule out 50 per cent. of the House of Commons and a very distinguished gentleman added, "Two thirds."

The way in which we order our business is fundamental to the way in which we take important political decisions. I have become increasingly disturbed by the suggestion that the House can somehow be organised as if it were a pea factory, with people pushing in inputs at one end, running a straightforward manufacturing line through and producing a nice, evenly balanced and beautifully prepared result at the other. That is not the way that it should work. We are here to represent our constituents, who have varied views and real interests. I am concerned that a consensus appears to be developing that will limit the powers of Back-Bench Members to express those views openly and with fervour.

Many of my hon. Friends sitting on these Benches today, let alone those on the Conservative Benches, could be numbered as part of the awkward squad. My very good hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has frequently used the procedures of the House to put over important points that both Front Benches were in danger of glossing over. Therefore, it behoves those of us who have been here a long time and have watched the development of various changes in procedure to look closely at what such changes entail.

I am strongly opposed to the timetabling of Bills. Frankly, that is not because I do not want to go home early. I would be happy to go home at a reasonable hour every night, but I understand that the work of Members of Parliament is becoming even more essential because of the powers that the Executive are taking every day. The Government have set out to hide vast areas of information.

They have changed the business of the civil service, so that there are an increasing number of agencies, which are made up of civil servants but are not answerable to the House of Commons in the way that they once were.

Hansard, which is absolutely essential to many of our constituents because of the information that it contains, increasingly does not have the routine answers—in detailed statistical and political terms—that enable people outside this place to know what the Government are doing in every sphere. The habit of sloughing off responsibility to executives of "next steps" agencies is increasing and can only make it more difficult for Members of Parliament to represent their constituents properly, and that should concern us very much.

Any move that either puts the provision of information a step further away or arranges the procedures of the House in such a way that only limited time can be given to the examination of a Bill can only be a derogation of power from this Chamber and should be considered very carefully.

I was here at the time of the Crossman experiment and the theory behind it was sensible. I listen to Members who say that we should have a proper working day and should organise ourselves completely differently. When do they deal with their correspondence? Who are these Members who are so free of constituency duties that they do not need the mornings to reply to letters from constituents and follow up case work? When do they sit on Committees? Do they not sit on any Committee? Do they never turn up for work on any of the European Standing Committees? Frankly, if that is the case, their advice is not much help.

There have been some useful modifications to our procedure. The European Standing Committees are a sensible development. If they do not work as well as they should, Members of this House must answer for it. If more Members used their right to turn up at European Committees and to ask the Minister detailed, factual questions for an hour, they would get far more information about what was happening to European legislation. They choose not to exercise that power, but that does not mean that it does not exist.

I want the Leader of the House seriously to consider a means of developing the powers of the European Standing Committees so that they have the right not only to study legislation but to amend what is brought before them and to ensure that it is debated on the Floor of the House. At present, it is entirely within the aegis of the Chairman of a Committee to accept a manuscript amendment. There is no guarantee that those amendments will be debated on the Floor of the House. Most simply go through the Chamber virtually on the nod because there is no procedure to consider them carefully. We ought to be able to give them that consideration. The Select Committees, which already have the power to send for people and papers, should have increasing powers, not merely to use the information properly and produce a report but to take detailed information about specific legislation and to debate that here.

My experience of any Government has taught me that they do not necessarily welcome careful and detailed scrutiny of their proposed legislation. Hon. Members who are so keen on altering the procedure might find that their views are slightly different when they are on the other side of the Chamber If the present Government had had that kind of support system, they might not have got themselves into the bizarre craziness of the poll tax fiasco and they might have had a rather better response to some of their other more disastrous bits of legislation.

For example, one may look at what the Select Committee on Transport did in relation to the Railways Bill. Much of the detailed and factual examination of the effects of privatisation should have made the Government pause, and not just because of the political implications. Many of the things that we warned about are now coming about and the Government will pay the price. In political terms, that does not cause me any great upset, but in reality it is a classic example of the folie de grandeur with which the Government went ahead, irrespective of the views of an all-party Committee that had taken detailed and important information.

Lots of hon. Members want to talk about the matter, and it was only because I felt that some of the issues were going by default that I wanted to contribute to the debate. I am happy to take part in debates in the Chamber in the morning, but it will mean that the work that I do now in my office will be done at some other time. People do not disappear because I do not answer their letters in the morning. Cases do not get simpler because I am elsewhere debating a subject.

The real problems for Parliament are the lack of accurate information about what it does and the refusal of the media to regard us as anything except a series of amusing sketches. Someone looking back to has happened at the present time may regard it as being of some moment that the political pages of our major broadsheets considered the future and past of a couple of beautiful guide dogs—of whom I am very fond—to be of more importance than the debate which took place on the Floor of the House last week.

I am increasingly concerned that both the Leader of the House—who I believe is genuinely interested in the subject and anxious to do something about it—and the Shadow Leader may reach agreements that may be convenient for both Front Benches, but which undervalue the rights of Back Benchers. That is happening all the time. When I first came here, if an hon. Member wanted to propose a ten-minute Bill, it was up to him what time he got up, and he went and queued like anybody else. Now, he has to have the agreement of the Whips. That is a little erosion, and arrangements between the two Front Benches mean that there is a movement away from the rights of Back Benchers.

When I first came here, there were a number of rights, which have since been quietly eroded by agreement between the two powerful Front Benches. That way lies perdition. People have been awkward in the name of democracy in British Parliaments since the 1600s. Those who give up their rights will be extremely sorry, whether they give them up under the banner of Maastricht or under the banner of a careful arrangement of parliamentary timetabling. Freedom of movement, freedom of speech and the freedom of Back Benchers to be damned awkward is what Parliament is all about.

5.25 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I spent 14 years on the Back Benches doing everything I could to exploit, use and—some would say—sometimes misuse the so-called anachronistic procedures of the House. I spent the past 14 months in the House doing everything I could

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to ensure that those procedures, without any truck from a Back Bencher, were overwhelmed by the majesty of the Front Bench.

The speeches by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) effectively encapsulate the main debate about the reform of procedure, and they both made legitimate speeches and arguments. There is no doubt that there is a case for reform in the late 20th century. Many new hon. Members have come to the House during the past five or 10 years, and there are young hon. Members and many more lady hon. Members with families who rightly want to consider the case for the modern way of doing things with more "sensible" hours.

Equally, the hon. Lady's point about the need to be wary before we plunge down the road of reform is equally important. I have been both poacher and gamekeeper and I suppose that, for the next few years, I shall be a poacher with an understanding of gamekeeping. There will be occasions when hon. Members who do not form part of a majority in the Lobby may rue the day when they throw away some of the seemingly arcane procedures.

Anybody who ever wanted a lecture on that subject had only to consult the late Bob Cryer when he was alive. He was able to achieve many things for himself and his constituency through his use of so-called arcane and anachronistic procedures.

There was an occasion in the mid-1980s when my constituency was faced with the possibility of receiving nuclear waste. There were three other hon. Members who faced the same possibility—one was the Government's Chief Whip, one was the junior Home Office Minister and the other was the present Attorney-General. I was the only Back-Bench Member, and I concluded that it might just be possible that those who had the Front Bench privilege might somehow be able to persuade the Secretary of State for the Environment that perhaps their constituencies should not receive nuclear waste. I concluded that I perhaps might draw the short straw and, for a year or two, I used and misused the procedures of the House, and some accused me of abusing them. I make no apology for having done that.

Liberal Democrat Members who describe the procedures of the House, and the House of Commons in general, as being held in "public contempt" should perhaps have rephrased the first line in the motion. What they perhaps meant to say in the first line was that this House notes the increasing public contempt for politicians, and not Parliament. I do not believe that there is any more contempt for Parliament today than there was 10 or 20 years ago. I am prepared to concede that there is an increasing contempt for politicians, but that is a different issue.

That is why the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was right to remind us of what may happen. In fairness, I think that there is a general majority in the House in favour of going down the road of parliamentary reform, and that is why the Liberal Democrat motion is not the appropriate motion to pass. If we are to go down that road, the document that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and his Select Committee produced some three years ago ought to be the reference point.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) may have done the House a service in allowing my right hon. Friend to reiterate the work that has already been done and, to that extent, today's debate may have been worth while. It has also provided an opportunity for the House to be reminded and warned by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich that individual Back Benchers do have—if they choose to study "Erskine May", precedent and the Standing Orders of the House—many protections. I have watched, from both the Back Benches and the Front Bench, hon. Members successfully defend the interests of their constituents through the use of many of the arcane procedures that the Liberal Democrats might wish to tip away.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has more experience in proving that point than anybody in the House.

Mr. Spearing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the word arcane is sometimes used in complete ignorance? For instance, the Question that I think Mr. Deputy Speaker will put at the end of this debate is that "the original words stand part of the Question". But without that reform, which was made in the early 1970s by the Procedure Committee of which I had the honour to be a member, no minority could vote on its own words. That is a first-rate example of what appears to be arcane, but is fundamentally democratic.

Mr. Brown: I agree absolutely. I am glad to note that it was a Conservative Government—my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale was involved in the process—who conceded to that perfectly legitimate request.

I accept that minorities have rights in the House and that minority parties take a great interest in what may happen whenever reforms are proposed by the two major parties. In the past 14 years, I have been a minority of one on more than one occasion—for example, when my constituency was the possible recipient of nuclear waste.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, who took issue with the Liberal motion, which calls for an

"urgent and comprehensive reform of Parliament, including changes to the format of Prime Minister's Question Time."

We hon. Members have it in our power to reform Prime Minister's Question Time, regardless of anyone else.

I have always attempted, with the aid of the Table Office, to table questions to the Prime Minister on subjects that I want to raise. I will table a question tomorrow, and until my name eventually hits the Order Paper, to ask the Prime Minister when he intends to carry out the commitment he gave at the Conservative party conference in 1992 to abolish the county of Humberside. I will put that question down on the Order Paper, without any suggestion from the Table Office that it should be transferred to the Secretary of State for the Environment.

When the Prime Minister comes to the House on the day when I am lucky in the ballot for Prime Minister's questions, he will know what I want to ask and he will be able to give the answer. I will then have a second bite at the cherry. If any other hon. Members who are concerned

about local government reform in Humberside want to express an opinion, we could have a mini-debate, as we used to do.

Every hon. Member should appreciate how much more effective he or she could be in reforming the procedures of the House by tabling specific questions. It has always amazed me, both from the perspective of the Back Benches and the Front Bench, how few hon. Members, unlike those of 30 years ago, take the opportunity to table a specific question.

Perhaps I should remind the House why hon. Members have opted for the open question. In the 1970s, Harold Wilson and, even more notably, Jim Callaghan, insisted on transferring questions that they felt could be legitimately answered by Departments of State. That is why we invented the open question.

When I came to the House in 1979, I went to the Table Office to table my first parliamentary question. I asked why I had to table a question about the Prime Minister's engagements. The Clerk replied, "You will be interested to know, Mr. Brown, that the new Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, has indicated that so long as your question is in order for the Government, if you wish to ask your question of her, she will answer it." I asked the Clerk whether that meant I could table a question on inflation, trade union laws or whatever and he replied that the Prime Minister had intimated to the Table Office that that was so.

We could reach an agreement between all the parties that the Prime Minister should not transfer any question that the Table Office deemed acceptable for answer by a representative member of the Government. If hon. Members wanted to table that question to the Prime Minister, Back Benchers could, overnight, return to the so-called golden age of Prime Minister's Question Time, when mini-debates were held.

I suspect, however, that if one reads the exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Times in the 1950s and 1960s without the benefit of rose-tinted spectacles, they will appear as much of a bear garden as some might say today's Prime Minister's Question Time has become. It will always be so, because, as hon. Members have already said, this is a debating Chamber. This is where we expect the cut and thrust. The Liberal party is somewhat naive—

Mr. Burns: Sanctimonious.

Mr. Brown: I note what my hon. Friend says.

The Liberal party is naive to have a discussion based on an airy-fairy notion that the public are fed up with the cut and thrust of debate. Members of the Liberal party are only too happy to go in for the cut and thrust of debate on the doorstep, when they say all sorts of things that may or may not be true of their political opponents, when it comes to trying to win by-elections. I make no complaint about that; it is political life. When politicians are fighting on the doorstep a by-election, county council elections or European elections, it is perfectly right for them, in a democratic society, to choose to use whatever tactic they think will most advance their cause. It is the same in here as it is out there; that is the richness of our democracy.

Notwithstanding the warnings of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, perhaps there is a case for making some reforms to our procedures now. After all, we spent a lot of time three years ago commissioning my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and his colleagues to study some of our procedures. We should tap into the mood that appears to exist across the Chamber in favour of making some reforms. There is no doubt that the House and hon. Members of today are different types from those of 30 years ago.

We must recognise that there is a mood in the House for some reform of procedures. We should not accept the terms of the Liberal motion, however, but take the Jopling report as our reference point. Whether we are talking about an individual Conservative or Opposition Back Bencher or a Conservative or Opposition Government, the arcane procedures—calls for the reform of which get cheap claps from our constituents—are the very procedures that sometimes guarantee us, as individual Members, our greatest powers.

5.36 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): In practice, our Parliament exists to provide the members of a Government and to scrutinise their proposals and their actions to the extent that that Government will allow. That is the problem. It is absolutely clear that that is no longer good enough. Our system of the combination of powers—having Ministers drawn from the legislature—always carries with it the danger of an ineffective Parliament. The Government have exploited that to the full.

In the course of studying Parliament for some years, I have carried out research into parliamentary reform and I have interviewed hon. Members and Officers of the House. I was surprised at the lack of demand for reform and the absence of imagination as to what our Parliament could be. In fact, our Parliament could be made much more effective quite easily, without any procedural revolution.

Two steps are necessary above all else. First, more powers should be given to the Speaker, because the independence of the Speaker is greatly under-exploited. Secondly, more powers and resources should be given to Select and Standing Committees.

The central problem is the overweening power of the Government over Parliament, which diminishes our democratic accountability. Our system is extraordinarily deficient in defending citizens' rights. Indeed, we have no rights which are not in the gift of Government to award or take away. As a consequence of that, Britain has been found guilty of infringing human rights by the European Court of Human Rights more often than any other country that is a signatory to the convention on human rights. In 27 cases, we have been required by the European Court to provide remedies to our citizens. It is clear that Britain should enact the European convention in our own domestic legislation so that British citizens would have direct redress through our courts instead of suffering the protracted processes of the European Court.

We devote the greatest part of our time—about a third—to legislation, yet badly drafted and defective legislation is rushed through the House. Examples are the Football Spectators Bill, the Dangerous Dogs Bill, the poll tax legislation and the Child Support Act 1991. The Government will not allow adequate time or resources for expert consideration. The special Bill procedure, which would allow Standing Committees to take evidence from witnesses on the purposes and likely effect of a Bill, has been used four times in 15 years and has not been used since 1984. Yet when it was used, it was pronounced a

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resounding success both by the Opposition and by Ministers subject to cross-examination under the procedure.

Every year, we examine 2,500 pages of primary legislation, yet some 10,000 pages of secondary legislation are pushed through the House with little discussion and no scope for amendment. Much of it is important, filling in the detail of primary legislation or determining such crucial issues as social security entitlements.

Mr. Dalyell: Hon. Members on the controversial Standing Committee on Scottish local government reform, which sat for 177 hours, pleaded courteously and seriously that the witness procedure be brought into operation at the first opportunity, but our wish was absolutely denied. It was not for want of trying.

Mr. Garrett: I am sure that it was not for want of trying. When the Standing Committee on the highly complex Companies Bill voted for the special Bill procedure to be used, the Government refused.

Avoiding parliamentary authorisation all together, the Government have used the royal prerogative ruthlessly—in effect, government by proclamation—to enable the United States to bomb Libya from places in Britain to declare the Gulf War to authorise jury vetting and telephone tapping to regulate the civil service and to ban unions at GCHQ.

The Government use a derivative of the royal prerogative—Crown immunity—to enable Departments to avoid the requirements of such protective statutes as health and safety legislation, as they affect Departments. I cannot see the justification for continuing the royal prerogative, because everything covered by it could easily be set before us properly in primary legislation.

We have inadequate arrangements for pre-legislative consideration and no post-legislative scrutiny. When an Act becomes unworkable, no arrangements exist for the Standing Committee that examined it in the first place to examine its implementation and call Ministers to account.

The Government have also been ruthless in their use of the guillotine, which was used six times between 1950 and 1960, and 43 times between 1979 and 1990. In that area of legislation, new powers should be given to the Speaker. For example, the Speaker should deem any Bill that infringes citizens' rights to require exceptionally careful and lengthy examination with, for instance, evidence-taking sessions by a Standing Committee or the use of a qualifying majority. The Speaker should also determine the timetabling of Bills so that adequate time is given for discussing important or controversial legislation.

Parliament's investigatory functions should be enhanced. It is worth noting that the relationship of Government, civil servants and Ministers to parliamentary Committees is governed by the Osmotherly rules, "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and the Armstrong memorandum, none of which have any statutory force or have been approved by the House. They are simply codes of practice which the Government drop on Select Committees and attempt to enforce.

Since their reform in 1979, Select Committees have been successful, but their work is hopelessly superficial and partial and they do not fulfil their terms of reference. They are established to examine policy, spending and administration, but concentrate exclusively on policy. They rarely look at Departments' management or spending, mainly because they cannot marshall the expertise or get expert staff to examine the details. A staff of two or three is clearly inadequate for a Select Committee to examine Departments' management and spending, particularly now that the machinery of Government has become so complex and has far outstripped the machinery of Parliament.

A typical Select Committee was originally set up to examine the policy, spending and management of one or two Departments. Now, a typical Select Committee is faced with examining one or two ministerial headquarters; five to 10 agencies; several score quangos; and innumerable contracts with private contractors. They cannot hope to cope with the explosion of information.

As in so many areas, we get Select Committees, which do a reasonable job within their limits, on the cheap. All the Select Committees cost some £3 million a year, of which £2 million is for printing reports. Much more investment must be made in Select Committees if they are to call Ministers to account effectively. They need expert staff capable of analysing the work of Departments, quangos and agencies, and their management and spending programmes. Those skills should be provided by a new research department in the House, staffed by accountants, analysts and specialists. There should also be a department of the Opposition, capable of providing civil service skills to Opposition Members on Standing Committees.

The growth of the flow of information from Government agencies and what I have called elsewhere the "dismemberment" of Government—the turning of Government from a unified civil service to a constellation of different agencies—has been matched by no growth whatever in Select Committees' analytical skills. I hope that a current issue in that area will be raised this week on the Floor of the House. I proposed to the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee that it should carry out a survey on civil servants' attitudes. It is conducting a study of the future of the civil service, but it is not enough simply to examine the great and the good—Ministers, experts and trade union leaders. It is also important to find out how that revolution in government affects ordinary civil servants.

I made the proposal, first, because it is necessary and, secondly, because I wanted to study the principle that Select Committees have the right to a research budget. To my surprise, the Committee accepted the proposal, yet the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has refused point blank to allow it to be carried out. Not only is that a breach of privilege but he should be censured for it. Although that Committee can summon 500 civil servants to give oral evidence whenever it wants, the Chancellor of the Duchy refuses to allow it to write to 500 civil servants. I hope that we shall have a debate and censure the Chancellor of the Duchy on that subject.

There are many other examples of the Government's authoritarian, reactionary and anachronistic attitude to Parliament, such as the facilities accorded to Members, the unfriendliness of Parliament to visitors and our constituents, and Parliament's supine attitude in defence of its rights. It is time for a thorough review of the Parliament's role, and I offer a few headings under which such a review could be carried out.

Contrary to constitutional theory, there are some important functions in which Parliament should have an independent locus and standing, neither conferred by the monarch nor in the gift of Government. First, all the

expenditure authorised by Parliament should be audited. At present, that is not allowed. Secondly, our citizens should be educated in parliamentary democracy. We spend virtually nothing on that aspect of our work. Thirdly, we should improve the quality and intelligibility of legislation. That is a matter for Parliament, not the Government, and the Speaker should ensure that legislation is examined for workability and intelligibility. Fourthly, we should protect and advance civil rights. Parliament has a duty to advance civil rights. Fifthly, we should enact and supervise freedom of information and, sixthly, we should oversee the responsible transfer of authority to the European Parliament. That is happening anyway and it should be done properly.

Those demands are not great. If they are to be implemented, we need a progressive Leader of the House who fulfils his terms of reference. Let me remind the Leader of the House of his terms of reference in the "Civil Service List":

"to uphold the rights and privileges of the House as a whole".

In my time, two Leaders of the House have attempted seriously to push forward parliamentary reform—Richard Crossman and Lord St. John of Fawsley. Since the time of Lord St. John of Fawsley, the Leader of the House—I am sorry to say it, because the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) is an amiable enough person—has been transformed from someone whose business is to defend the rights and privileges of the House to someone who simply acts as the Cabinet's major-domo.

Mr. Tony Banks: For the time being.

Mr. Garrett: For the time being. I hope that we get a better one.

That is a depressing conclusion. I should have preferred the Leader of the House, instead of spending the first third of his speech being rude to the Liberals or whoever in that silly, schoolboyish way, to devote his attention to what the House of Commons is for and how its rights could be established and entrenched.

5.50 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): What a difference an hour makes. An hour ago, the serried ranks of the Liberal Democrats were present for their motion, all sitting "doughnutting" for the television cameras that they knew would be on them. Now the rag-tag and bobtail of the Liberal Democrats remain. Their opening spokesman does not even do them the courtesy of being here to listen to the debate in time for the closing speeches.

This is an issue of great importance to the House of Commons and it is very much an issue which, as many previous contributors to the debate said, can be tackled only through the agreement of the House of Commons and not the imposition of the Executive.

The platitudinous motion, which could have been written on the back of an envelope in the Cock and Bull public house simply to try to appeal to as many people as possible, does not do a service to the House or further the debate. The opening speech did not add much to our sum of knowledge of the subject, except for the extremely interesting admission that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) extracted from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) who admitted that the public's perception of the Liberal Democrats as politicians was that they were lazy and not especially interested in this place. I think that the House of Commons deserves better than that, although I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East for at least getting some honesty out of the Liberal Democrats.

The motion begins with the words:

"That this House notes the increasing public contempt for Parliament".

That is trite and when, as an individual, one asks one's constituents about Parliament, one does not receive that answer. Yes, one does receive answers that Prime Minister's Question Time and other big House of Commons occasions may be too rowdy, although people certainly concentrate on watching and listening to them on television and radio because they find them informative, interesting and entertaining. That cannot be taken away, as the figures clearly show it.

I would argue that the contempt that people feel is not for the work that goes on in this Chamber or in the Standing Committees and Select Committees, or for the work that we all do as individual hon. Members on our constituency cases, which was so graphically described by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in her argument about the hours that we should work. The contempt is at the sharp end of politics which spills over into the House, but which people come up against on the streets and in our constituencies at election time. It gives me no pleasure to say this, but most people respect and admire the campaigning tactics of the Labour party and the Conservative party but utterly reject the campaigning tactics of the Liberal Democrats. They will reject the use of their leaflets. We have seen the handbooks that have leaked into the press, all of which contribute to the contempt of Parliament, telling the Liberal Democrats to jump on to a bandwagon when they know the result so that they can claim the credit when the decision has been taken, and to falsify the opinion polls, to cause confusion in the minds of the electorate as to who may be the main challenger, so that it will benefit the Liberal Democrats. All members of the Labour party and the Conservative party know those tactics. The sad fact of life is that, although it is far divorced from the work in the House, those tactics enhance and increase the contempt for politicians as a profession and for the House of Commons.

Bold statements were made today about there not being enough scrutiny. One of the specific examples given by the hon. Member for North Cornwall was that there was not enough scrutiny in the Committees upstairs. I do not know how many Committees the hon. Gentleman has served on in the past two years when he has been a Member of the House, but I have served on a number of Committees in the past seven years and I have witnessed the line-by-line examination of the Bills that come before us. I am surprised that the Liberal Democrats made a positive complaint about the scrutiny that takes place in those Standing Committees.

I take as an example the recent Standing Committee on the Intelligence Services Bill. That important issue was taken upstairs in Committee for vigorous examination before returning to the Floor of the House. One would expect the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) to be an expert on that subject as GCHQ is in his constituency. The people of Cheltenham—and also the hon. Member for North Cornwall, if he had done some research before he made that criticism—might be surprised to learn that the hon. Member for Cheltenham did not turn up to all the sittings of that Committee although it was not only a constituency issue, but, according to the hon. Member for

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North Cornwall, an important area in which we must scrutinise the legislation passing through the House and where the House is failing, according to the hon. Gentleman, because it is not taken seriously enough.

If one wishes to make criticisms of procedures in the House—and heaven knows, criticisms can be made—one should at least do it when one's party is whiter than white and squeaky clean. It does no good to the party of the hon. Member for North Cornwall to try to bring the House into disrepute by making accusations of that nature when many hon. Members from all political parties spend a great deal of time in Standing Committees, monitoring and examining the legislation that passes through Parliament.

I was also interested to hear several criticisms about the oral question system in the House. I shall take one example, which my Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) mentioned. Specific criticism was made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall about Ministers replying to questions by saying that they would write to the questioner giving greater details as an answer to the question. That is fine if it will increase the knowledge and information that the hon. Gentleman or Lady who has asked the question requires. Moreover, the hon. Member for North Cornwall is quite wrong to criticise that as a failure of the questioning system when exactly that stance was taken this afternoon in the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham from the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend who was answering questions this afternoon, the name of whose constituency I cannot remember.

Mr. Kirkwood: Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Mr. Burns: If it is all right for the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to do it, it is reasonable for Ministers to do the same thing when they feel that it would enhance the knowledge that they can impart to a colleague.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) will forgive me if I say that while I congratulate him and his colleagues on their report, I wish to make several arguments on the subject.

The recommendation to complete the sitting days Monday to Thursday by 10 o'clock and Fridays by 2.30 pm is, in many ways, attractive and appealing. We would not have the ridiculous situation, which even Members who entered the House after 1987 have had to go through, of being here until 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock, 5 o'clock or even later in the morning. Obviously, no one in their right mind can think straight and do a decent job of work at those hours on top of all the work that they have done in the morning and afternoon of what may be the preceding day but is still the same parliamentary day. However, I repeat the caution issued by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown): if our sitting hours are restricted, the powers of the Executive are increased.

Although I was not a Member of Parliament at the time, I worked here between 1975 and 1979, when the Labour Government had a small majority and then lost it. The House was kept sitting for long hours, night after night. That may have been a crashing bore for hon. Members on both sides of the House—regrettably, it may even have caused some health problems—but it gave Back Benchers and the Opposition of the day more powers to seek to limit and control the Executive.

That may be an arcane way of operating the procedures of the House, but I do not consider it wise to jump on the bandwagon of automatically restricting the hours of the House to set times that are unrealistically short. That would limit the powers of Back Benchers—the members of the awkward squad about whom we heard in earlier speeches today—and of the Opposition.

Mr. Tony Banks: One aspect of the Parliament to which the hon. Gentleman referred was the narrowness of the then Government's majority. Indeed, in a sense they were not a majority Government. In such circumstances, the Back Bencher's power becomes far greater. In subsequent Parliaments, with a Government majority of more than 100, it was obviously far more difficult for the Opposition to catch all Conservative Members out at the same massage parlour on the same night. The power of the Back Bencher is, in a sense, commensurate with the size of the Government's majority.

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman is right, up to a point. Clearly, it would rarely be possible to whittle away a large Government majority; but if the system and the sitting hours are used to demoralise the Government of the day and their Back Benchers and to argue constantly against whatever is the current issue, it is potentially easier to persuade the Government to backtrack or amend legislation. If we operate in a fixed, rigid straitjacket, the Government will know that at 10 pm or at 2.30 pm that will be it: they will have their legislation.

I merely caution hon. Members to think carefully. I fear that I shall be an old man before it happens, but at some point—probably just before my retirement—we shall have a non-Conservative Government. The torch of opposition will be passed to my younger colleagues, with whom I shall have grown up; I may not have had the experience of opposition. They will feel frustrated if they are put in a straitjacket and prevented from opposing because they have been deprived of the time in which to harry the Government in the traditional way.

Mr. Garrett: In two consecutive sentences of an increasingly fatuous speech, the hon. Gentleman said both that the smallness of a majority enabled Government Back Benchers to exercise more power and that they were demoralised. Which was it?

Mr. Burns: I said that if the Opposition harried the Government, and kept it up night after night, Government and Back Benchers might become demoralised by the sheer physical fatigue of the exercise and the increased time available to Opposition Members to argue their case for change. The Government might then backtrack or amend legislation. I did not say that that would definitely happen, but it is a possibility that would not exist if the Government of the day knew that at 10 pm, for instance, the business must end and a Bill or a Report stage would be secure.

I certainly believe that the time came many years ago for us to amend the early-day motion system radically. It is a gross abuse, and a ridiculous, pathetic opportunity for parliamentary graffiti. Some absurd motions have clearly been tabled for the benefit of the "Wapping Times", the

"Brentwood Gazette" or whatever the Member of Parliament's local paper may be. We should get a grip: the system is a waste of time and money which genuinely misleads the public. Special interest lobbying groups tell them, "Write to your Member of Parliament: get him to vote for this motion, or sign that motion—we can change the world by ensuring that it is passed by the House of Commons."

As we all know, most of these ridiculous motions never see the light of day on the Floor of the House. Some of those prayed against by the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats reach the Floor of the House or are dealt with in Committee: that, indeed, is what the procedure should be for. The others, however, are a waste of time. The system should be changed as quickly as possible, to save time and money and to lower the expectations of people outside who assume that because the motions are on the Order Paper of the House of Commons they are much more important than they are. I hope that the issue will be re-examined soon by my right hon. Friend and by the relevant Committee.

I welcome the reference in the report to restricting ways and means debates to 45 minutes. The late Bob Cryer was a past master in this regard, rightly using the procedure to highlight what he perceived as injustices or other faults in legislation, but open-ended ways and means debates were potentially vulnerable to abuse. The implementation of the recommendation for reform will benefit the workings of the House.

Paragraph 98 of the report, which deals with proxy voting, recommends that

"the Speaker and representatives of all parties should convene a conference with a view to making recommendations on this matter."

Again, I urge caution. Part of the nature of the Chamber is that we must enter the Aye and No Lobbies through what some may consider archaic procedures. After eight minutes, the doors are locked and they are not unlocked until the end of the vote. We cannot have a system—I accept that the recommendation does not suggest such a system, but it has been suggested—enabling hon. Members to press a button to vote. There are only 437 places in the Chamber, and it does not possess the "desk" system that many other legislatures have.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East has suggested pressing buttons in the Lobby walls. I do not think that that would work; it does not get round the system of proxy votes. If we are to vote here, all who wish to vote should be present to cast their votes. The 1979 general election was triggered by the fact that one Labour Member was unable to come to the House to vote; due to illness, he had to stay up in Yorkshire. Paradoxically, I believe, a late Member of Parliament who represented Fermanagh and South Tyrone came over as a guest of the Labour Whips to abstain in person—much to the shock of the Labour Whips who, having flown him over, had apparently locked him in the Strangers Bar with plenty of light refreshment to keep him happy. It would take away a great deal from the nature of the Chamber and the way in which we do our business if we were to introduce a form of proxy vote.

Mr. Jopling: I am interested in what my hon. Friend says as I did a little research into the matter some years ago. We know that the average large Division in this House takes about 12 minutes. I inquired into the amount of time it takes for a Division in the United States, which has electronic voting. I discovered that even with that system a Division takes no less time. In addition, our system of voting gives Back Benchers a tremendous opportunity to buttonhole and cross-examine, on the move, members of the Executive.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I whole-heartedly agree with him, especially on his latter point. As he says, our system gives us a golden opportunity to speak to Ministers and even the Prime Minister, which would not be possible with a different voting system.

We could, however, make a change which would not need legislation or debate and end the prolonging of open-ended debates and the wasting of time by the calling of unnecessary and fatuous votes simply to delay our Adjournment each evening. It is within the power of even just two hon. Members to call a Division. If Members would act in a more mature and restrained manner, we could overcome that problem.

We could also overcome the ridiculous procedure that has been evident on Fridays in recent months of hon. Members calling "I spy Strangers" simply to disrupt the business. On one occasion in December it was done to obtain an automatic change of business because there were not sufficient hon. Members present to vote—despite the fact that it was an extremely important debate in which a number of hon. Members wanted to participate because it was of specific interest to their constituents. After about an hour and a quarter of that debate, which should have lasted five hours, it was automatically curtailed through the arrogance of two hon. Members who felt that it was their duty and right to end a debate in which they had no interest. There is something ridiculous about a system which allows that and it could be amended overnight by hon. Members behaving in a more restrained and respectable way.

6.12 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Anyone listening to this debate and hoping that the decline of Parliament will be arrested or reversed will be disappointed—unless he or she is married to a member of this Government or the next Government, in which case they will be delighted because it is obvious that the system is dominated by the Executive or the alternative Executive. If we add together the members of the Government, their Parliamentary Private Secretaries, the shadow Cabinet—almost as numerous as the Government—the former Ministers who still think as they did when they were in the Executive, the "wanabees" —those who would do almost anything to become members of the Executive—and those Members of Parliament who are coasting gently towards retirement or life after death in another place, the potential block of reformers diminishes to such an extent that hardly anyone is left to bear the torch of parliamentary reform.

There are those who are happy to watch the game of Government and Parliament being played between the Government and Opposition Front Benches. In a way, we undervalue ourselves as individuals, as parties and as a collective if we assume that once we make that journey in a car driven by a chauffeur and have our hands in a red box, somehow qualitatively and in intelligence and knowledge we are apart from the rest—that somehow on the two Front Benches there is a monopoly of competence and a residue of all the intellect, demands and requirements necessary for governing a country. Many people still think that, but surely experience should have taught even them that that perspective is wrong.

[Mr. Bruce George]

I do not argue for a Congress-style government. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) spoke of Congress being rather bland. I would swap the noise and excitement of this House for a little of the blandness of the US Congress because that is a real legislature—a policy-making legislature and not a policy-influencing or rubber-stamp legislature such as this place has been for a century. We shall go into the next century as supine in relation to the for the moment invisible Executive as we have been in the past.

Some of us do not necessarily want our Chamber to be called a legislature if we do not meet the basic requirements of a legislature. Almost every part of our society has seen major change during the past 20 to 50 years. Few structures in society have been left unaltered; yet parliamentary procedures and structures have been left almost intact. Apart from the lack of top hats, beards and gas lighting, a returning Disraeli or Gladstone or an analyst such a Trollope would find the House of Commons almost exactly as he had left it.

There have been changes—many, many changes—to the way in which our procedural proposals have been implemented, but let us not mistake change for reform. Changes there have been many; reforms there have been few. There has been much constitutional tinkering, but what is needed is basic reform—not necessarily immediate reform of the structures, but first a reform of attitude. I suspect that the attitude to reform is as weak now as it ever has been.

Some 10 years ago, after the 1980-81 reforms, I wrote a chapter on parliamentary reform in a book and I was rather excited about the changes that had taken place. Using something of a D-Day analogy 10 years in anticipation, I said that we had now stormed the beach head and it remained only to fan out into enemy territory and capture more and more of the bastions held by the Executive. Ten years later, however, we are as far away from reform as ever. Reform flickers on, kept alive by a few distinguished colleagues—my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) is one, and there are hon. Members on both sides who maintain the desire for reform—but tradition is strong and inertia even stronger.

In the early 1980s, there were many important changes. There was a Procedure Committee report in the mid-1970s, although only about one third of its recommendations were implemented. In 1980, we gained Select Committees, Special Standing Committees, better staffing levels, better salaries, financial reform and a House of Commons Commission. Those were substantial changes. I had hoped that a new Parliament would be strong enough to defy the Executive in some ways. There was a large influx of Conservative Members who previously had been in business, who were used to being the shakers and the movers. I had hoped that when they came to this place they would shake and move—and so they did, but into inertia. The result was that those reforms stalled and came to nothing. The Leader of the House mentioned the few little, titillating things that may come about. That is not fundamental reform. It is reforming on the edges and it will not remotely deal with the fundamental weakness of this House. We are too supine, too prepared to listen to what the Government say on their side of the House and to what our Front-Bench spokesmen and spokeswomen say on ours. Those great days of the 1970s were great days because Government Back Benchers had some influence. The Government had to take their own Back Benchers into account, which is not often done. The Opposition were happy because they had a great input in decision making. The Liberal party was happy because, for a while, it had some sort of input into decision making.

I hoped that the Select Committee on Procedure and that environment of the 1970s would provide the push for reform, which would have made the House a genuine legislature. What happened after the first reforms which introduced the four Special Standing Committees? Why was that experiment abandoned? It was abandoned for one simple reason. The Bills considered were non-contentious and absolutely non-controversial. The Criminal Attempts Bill—a little controversial—the Education Bill, the Deep Sea Mining (Temporary Provisions) Bill and the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill were not basically fundamental dividing pieces of legislation, but the Government got a bloody nose. One Bill to amend the sus law was based, apparently, on the recommendations of a professor from Nottingham, but when he came before the inquiry part of the Standing Committee he said that he might have supported the Bill's principles a little time previously, but that, having seen the legislation drafted, he was totally opposed to it. It was game, set and match, and clause 1 of the Bill was withdrawn. It happened to the other Bills, too, so the Government said that they did not want the legislature to start legislating because it would be the end of the existing system of government. I have set examination questions, such as "Legislation is more the function of Government than the legislature—discuss," and it is absolutely true.

Special Standing Committees are out of the window. Select Committees, the St. John-Stevas—or the Jopling—reforms were very important, but what happened afterwards? What powers did we have? We had great powers to send for persons and papers, to meet from time to time, to appoint advisers. They were basic powers, but the whole thing hardly amounted to a row of beans. We may increase the transparency of Government, if they are prepared to have a little light shone on their activities, but after some 14 years of Select Committees and a great deal of effort involving staff, witnesses, advisers and hon. Members, what have we achieved? On how many occasions have we compelled the Government to change their mind? I suspect that the answer would not be too illuminating because it would be too humiliating to admit that, after thousands and thousands of hours of endeavour, we have made precious little impact on the process of decision making.

With other hon. Members, I have talked to those involved in the newly emerging democracies in eastern Europe. I was in eastern Europe quite recently and people there said that it was wonderful to have me come along from the mother of Parliaments, with a fine Defence Committee, and asked me to tell them what we do. They asked me to give them the secrets of our control over the budgetary process. I said, "I am sorry, but we do not have much control". They asked me what control we had over intelligence services. I said, "I am sorry, but we do not have any control at all over the intelligence services". They asked me to tell them what impact our Select Committees have on legislation. I said, "Actually, the process of legislation and the Select Committee procedure are quite

separate. We have not the slightest effect on the legislative process". They said to me, "You are on the Defence Committee, Mr. George. What impact does your Committee have on the procurement process? How much of your budget is taken up with defence expenditure? What part do you play in deciding whether major or smaller items of expenditure are allowed to continue? I said, "I am very sorry, but we do not have the slightest impact." It is humiliating and embarrassing. I am not surprised that they are not asking us to tell them any more about how to become a Parliament, as we have very little to tell them. In the Ukraine recently I asked someone what they did in their Parliament and they rattled off a list of functions and powers. I told that person that people there had have achieved more in two years than we had in 700; they should not be listening to us—we should shut up and listen to them.

Mr. Jopling: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that most members of the departmental Select Committees in the House would die of shock if they were told that they had to deal with legislation as well?

Mr. George: It is not that members or supporters of the Government would necessarily feel excluded. I suspect that, if we had Special Standing Committees, Members on the Opposition Front Bench would feel a little excluded from the process. I should like to see Select Committees having a bigger legislative role. We spend a lot of time on the issues of foreign affairs, defence and education and it may be sensible that those people who develop an expertise should have some input into the process of legislation.

I am sorry to have gone on for far too long—almost as long as the Minister, the Opposition spokesman and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). Back Benchers will probably spend less than half the amount of time talking about parliamentary reform that those on the Front Benches took. I am conducting a survey of defence committees in 50 countries throughout the world and one thing is patently obvious from the 35 replies that I have received. I can put historical and contemporary defence committees from all those countries into three bundles. The United States Congress is alone. At the other end of the continuum is the supreme soviet of the Soviet Union and those former communist eastern European legislatures which had no effect on policy whatever. I would put the mass of other legislatures in the middle, but they all do more on their defence committees than we do. We have one thing in common with France: we are both supine legislatures, totally dominated by our respective Executives. So long as we are prepared to tolerate that—

Mr. Garrett: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. George: Yes, but I was about to finish.

Mr. Garrett: I very much sympathise with what my hon. Friend says and he is absolutely right, but surely our Select Committees have all the terms of reference that they need. All that they lack is the ambition on the part of their members to be more effective. That is the heart of problem.

Mr. George: I said earlier that it was an attitudinal problem more than a procedural problem. Our Defence Committee is very active, there is a 76 per cent. attendance rate, we produce many reports and we do a very good job, but we have been so used to being spoon fed and to having big brother tell us what to do that we would not know what to do if we were given the freedom to do it. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South is absolutely right. There ought to be collusion between all the eight sets of Back Benchers. That happens occasionally when we discuss pay and research assistants, but those are the only occasions on which there is a cross-party Back-Bench alliance. I like to think of myself as a Back Bencher in the House. I am not ashamed of being a Back Bencher only. I am not ashamed that I have not been called to high office. I believe that being a Back Bencher ought to be important, but regrettably it is not important. I should like to see Back Benchers on both sides of the House getting together against the Government Front Bench, the Opposition Front Bench, and perhaps even against hon. Members on some part of the Liberal Democrat Bench, to say that we must do more. We have a collective expertise that is not insignificant. Let us try to exercise those powers more strongly than in the past. Let us try to defy our Front Benches a little more and perhaps we shall see a Palace of Westminster that is vibrant and not merely an echo chamber for our respective Front Benches.

6.30 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) struck a chord in his concluding remarks with those of us who have never held office, and never will, in this place. I congratulate him on the content of his speech and on the atmosphere that he created. To be honest, I think that he is rather pessimistic about the reforms or changes that have taken place. I suspect that, deep down, he is arguing for a separation of powers between the House and the Government, but that separation cannot take place. A relevant comparison, perhaps, is the way in which the House does its work and the approach adopted by the United States Congress. That, however, is a wider subject and I do not want to trespass on it.

Shortness of time—perhaps this is just as well—precludes me from saying very much about the Liberal Democrats' motion. The leader of that party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), sets out in his book —I hasten to add that I have not bought a copy; instead I obtained a copy from the Library—with some pride how he decided to leave the House for two and a half days every week to travel round the country.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman appreciates a free plug for "Beyond Westminster: finding hope in Britain". I suppose that most of us do not have the luxury of leaving the House for two and a half days a week, depending on our parliamentary duties. There may be a few who think that the right hon. Gentleman's approach is treating Parliament with contempt, but I let that pass.

I want to talk about the Jopling Committee's report because I was a member of that Committee. I agree very much with the comments of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). Indeed, I often agree with the hon. Lady, as she knows so well. We serve together on a Standing Committee on European Documents. I agreed with her so much when she said that the House cannot be treated like a factory. Basically, parliamentary democracy is a messy business. It cannot be organised to the nth degree. In modern Labour party terms, I suppose that I count myself as a moderniser of the House. Given all the arguments that the hon. Lady advanced so

[Mr. David Harris]

eloquently, we should not be prevented from trying to do our job or from trying to ensure that the House does its job that much better than it does now.

Things have changed dramatically in the past 20 years or so. I arrived in the Press Gallery as a journalist more than 30 years ago. That being so, I am aware of the changes that have taken place, not least in the workings of the parliamentary press.

Mr. Dalyell: Its representatives are not here.

Mr. Harris: One or two are. At 5 o'clock, there was only one reporter in the Press Gallery, who was from the Press Association. When I came to the Press Gallery decades ago, *The Daily Telegraph*, for which I worked, had a substantial Gallery staff as well as a Lobby staff. Two of us were always left on until 4 am, which was the final time for the last edition. We remained so that we could flash through to the stop press the immortal words, "The House was still sitting at 4 am." Nowadays, not many journalists are in the Press Gallery, and certainly not after 6 pm. I am not saying, of course, that we should tailor our proceedings in response to the publicity that we get or do not get, but attendance in the Press Gallery is one change in the equation.

There have been many other changes, including some that I think and hope make it inevitable that the time has come for the report of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). The tragic death of the Leader of the Opposition, the late John Smith, has given impetus to the report. It is recognised that there is a need for change.

In addition, there was the lamentable breakdown of relationships between the two Front Benches a short while ago. I shall not go into the reasons, because I think that most of us have forgotten what the argument was about. That breakdown told us, however, that the Opposition do not achieve their aims by trying to keep the House up all night. Those days have gone. They might have applied some years ago, but the Great British public are certainly not impressed nowadays by the macho business of the House sitting right through the night. That cuts no ice outside. Oppositions do not achieve their aim by going in for those tactics. Governments, both Conservative and Labour, are usually resilient enough to withstand that sort of pressure. As I have said, no one is listening and no one is impressed. That is a great change.

The attitude of the membership of the House has changed. It is true that many of those who have come into the House in recent intakes regard staying up all night as nonsensical.

The most important reason why we should change our procedures is that we need to make the current way in which we approach legislation much more effective. It is nonsensical for us to spend hours and hours, especially in Committee or on Report, either in Committee Rooms or on the Floor of the House, on matters that do not count—time-wasting matters. When that happens, the Government introduce a timetable motion. We then have to rush through the concluding parts of the Bill without due consideration. It is far better to have a sensible timetable —we can argue about how we arrive at it—and consider the Bill in a measured way. I think that that approach will make for much better government.

We have every reason to criticise all Governments for bringing so much unprepared legislation before the House. For a time, I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lord Howe, as he is now.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Very distinguished.

Mr. Harris: Indeed. When he was Leader of the House, I was appalled at the way in which draftsmen had not prepared legislation because of the pressure that had been put on them, in a proper way. It was taken for granted that much of that legislation would be corrected in Committee, on the Floor of the House or in another place. That is not the right way to proceed. We want much less legislation and much better-quality legislation, and that is what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said. Those developments are essential.

The right time must be taken to consider reports such as that which has been produced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale. As I have said, I think that its time has come, just as I think that the introduction of the televising of the House took place at precisely the right time. I was opposed to the televising of our proceedings when it was proposed earlier, but I took the view that, with changing circumstances, it was right to introduce it when it happened, not least for technical reasons. Despite what was said much earlier in the debate, it has been a great success. If we approach the Jopling report in the spirit of consensus, the changes outlined in it will similarly be a great success.

Finally, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I thought that he came in for some unfair criticism from the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett). I believe that my right hon. Friend has approached the issue in the correct way. I was pleased to hear the tribute paid to him by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). My right hon. Friend is proceeding carefully. He has to balance all the difficulties that lie with the need for reform against the sensible points made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich. These are difficult matters, but I am confident that the House is now reaching consensus. I believe that the consensus will result not in the dramatic changes that some Members want but in a structure that will enable the House to perform its ancient function in modern times in a much better way than it has done in recent years.

6.39 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the two minutes available, I want simply to focus on Prime Minister's questions.

Last autumn, I was incapacitated following a hip operation. Therefore, I had to watch Tuesday's, Wednesday's and Thursday's "Westminster Live". Never was there a greater misnomer among programmes. It was not Westminster live at all. It was punditry and Prime Minister's questions.

That leads me to the point that many of our constituents have the impression that Parliament is simply Prime Minister's questions and little else. Bluntly, sitting there, I was ashamed of how the House of Commons looked.

I can tell the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) that it was not a question of rapier-like debate. It was a bear garden. There were very few rapier-like debates. I believe that there is a solution to that. First, television has an obligation to broadcast

questions other than Prime Minister's questions and to give a good deal of time to them. Great credit often comes to the House of Commons from specific questions.

We should return to the very old days when my first Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, would transfer any question which was not directly relevant to the office of Prime Minister. That had several advantages. It led to coherent questioning and the Prime Minister would know what subjects he had to address.

I should like to ask the Leader of the House a question. How much time, effort and energy does the Prime Minister of the day have to spend having the day's papers examined in an effort to identify what questions he is likely to be asked?

Mr. Harris: All morning.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) says all morning. I do not think that the Prime Minister of Great Britain should have to spend all morning searching around and wondering what he or she would be asked. I hope that an incoming Labour Prime Minister would not have to do that. That was one of the points that I raised with John Smith. The amount of civil service time taken up in that procedure is absolutely appalling.

There is an answer to that problem, and that is the use of the private notice question by the Opposition Front Bench. If that process were used, there could be coherent scrutiny which is simply not possible under a system which, whether or not we like it in this House, has become a disgrace to Parliament.

6.42 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I am grateful for the opportunity to sum up this important debate for my party. I have enjoyed listening to some excellent contributions from all parts of the House. However, I was saddened by the fact that some hon. Members preferred to close their eyes to the real issue. They are like people on the Titanic insisting that the ship is unsinkable as they slide across the dining room floor which is at an angle of 45 deg. They argue that our parliamentary democracy is in safe hands as long as it is in the hands of the Conservative Front Bench or the Opposition Front Bench.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made a telling and important contribution. I heard no argument against his position from any hon. Member which persuaded me that his analysis was faulty. Whatever some Conservative or Opposition Members may feel, it is quite obvious to me that Parliament, and the House of Commons in particular, has seen its reputation collapse.

In my constituency and around the country, I am frequently asked what on earth Members of Parliament are playing at down here in Westminster. Very often that question is put as a joke because that is how our antics are viewed by a vast proportion of the public. However, the sad fact is that it is no laughing matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall made his points very well. The picture that he painted was worrying to any believer in the value of the democratic process. However, for those who still doubt that there is any need for change, the way in which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and other private Members' Bills have been treated is a perfect example of everything that has gone rotten at the heart of government. It provides overwhelming evidence for the kind of reform of Parliament for which we have been calling for a good many years.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The hon. Lady is right to particularise about issues of concern. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill has now been discussed here and in the House of Lords for 37 and a half hours. There has been no vote against its principles or purpose. It has been subjected to systematic obstruction.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful for that intervention. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said, the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill has been brought before this House 12 times in the past 20 years. Disabled people today are in almost the same position that they were in 20 years ago. They are still second-class citizens. They are still denied their basic civil rights and they are still unable to take their rightful place in society and make the contribution to that society that they are able to make. The reason is that the Government did not like the Bill. What a disgrace and what total abuse of power.

The Government have not liked previous Bills conferring civil rights on disabled people. However, civil rights for disabled people is a very popular idea. No one can understand why disabled people should not be given the same rights as women and ethnic minorities whose special rights are guaranteed in law. Those views, which are held in the country, are also held in this House where an overall majority of hon. Members, from all parties and from both sides of the House, support the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. However, the Government do not like the Bill.

We are in a position where the majority of people in the country and the majority of hon. Members want civil rights legislation for disabled people, but because the Government, for their own peculiar and dogmatic reasons, do not want that legislation on the statute book, there is nothing anyone can do about it. That is an abuse of the principle that Parliament is sovereign. It replaces that principle with a notion that it is the Government who should be able to dictate every aspect of our lives quite irrespective of the concerns of modern British society.

That situation shows up most glaringly the urgent need for the reform of the procedure by which the merits of private Members' Bills are tested in the House. After all, the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is not the only example of a private Member's Bill which has been wrecked by the Government, but, in my opinion, it is one of the worst. The same thing happened to the Medicines Information Bill, the Tobacco Advertising Bill and the Energy Conservation Bill, to name just a few.

The Medicines Information Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), sought to amend section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 and give the public a right to know facts about the safety and effectiveness of medicines, the reasons for a licence having been granted and details of any side-effects reported after licensing. The Bill was supported by almost every medical body, by the National Consumer Council and by groups representing people who are the victims of the side-effects of drugs. However, the Bill had two opponents: certain sections of the pharmaceutical industry and the Government.

The Medicines Information Bill went through its first two stages without much of a hitch. However, the wrecking

[Ms Lynne]

amendments appeared all of a sudden in Committee. The fate of the Bill was therefore sealed. On Report, more than 40 extra amendments were tabled, and the Bill was talked out. So much for the commitment to open government that was made by the Prime Minister from his soapbox only a year previously. So much for parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Duncan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Lynne: I am afraid that I do not have time; the Leader of the House wishes to speak.

The fate of the Tobacco Advertising Bill, which was sponsored by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), was the same. The purpose of that Bill was to ban tobacco advertising so that young people especially were not tempted to take up smoking. The idea behind it was to reduce the incidence of smoking-related illness which, apart from being a tragedy to sufferers and their families, is a huge financial burden on the health service. Once again, the Bill was supported by all medical bodies and had widespread support from the public at large and the majority of hon. Members. The Bill had two opponents: yet again the Government and the tobacco industry.

In Committee, wrecking amendments were tabled and defeated, so on Report 108 amendments were tabled by Conservative Members and, yet again, the Bill was talked out. So much for the sovereignty of Parliament.

The Energy Conservation Bill, which was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), was another tragic case in point. I say "tragic" because its provisions would have led to help being given to those suffering most acutely the imposition of VAT on fuel. Again, that Bill had widespread support in the House, support from concerned organisations and support from people throughout the country, but, once again, the Bill was opposed by the Government. Many amendments, this time drafted by parliamentary counsel, on the instructions of the Secretary of State for the Environment, were tabled and the Bill was talked out. So much for the Government who listen.

Mr. Jopling: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Lynne: I am afraid I do not have time. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; the Leader of the House wishes to speak.

So much for the Government who listen and who believe in the sovereignty of Parliament. The Government, with impunity, use their control over the allocation of time in the Chamber to stifle any legislation however popular, however necessary and however important if they and their friends in big business find their own reasons for doing so.

Recently, a more sinister development has come to our attention. During debate on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, I and other Members requested the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People and Back-Bench Conservative Members to reveal the source of the amendments that they had tabled. The answers to those questions resulted in two Members, including the Minister, being forced on to the Floor of the House to apologise for misleading the House. That was an unprecedented occurrence within anyone's memory. They had been hiding the fact that many of the amendments that had been tabled had been drafted by civil servants in the form of parliamentary counsel, not only under instructions from the Department, under the Secretary of State for Social Security, but with the collusion of the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Education.

Mr. Jopling: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Lynne: I am afraid I do not have time; it is 6.52 pm.

That civil servants should be used in that way to further party political policy is to plumb new depths of abuse.

Through a series of further written questions, I managed to force an admission from four Ministers that they had authorised parliamentary counsel to draft amendments to private Members' Bills that were opposed by the Government. Those amendments were then passed to Conservative Back-Bench Members so that they would do the Government's dirty work. It is obvious that that practice has become endemic. It is obvious also that the civil service is no longer independent.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall rightly said, comprehensive reform of Parliament is needed so that those abuses do not occur again. But, as a first step, the Government could show their willingness to tackle the crisis of confidence by changing the procedure by which private Members' Bills are considered. Private Members' Bills should be eligible for timetabling in the same way as Government business, a whole day should be devoted to Third Reading, and a vote should then be taken. Perhaps also the ten-minute rule could be applied to debate on private Members' Bills to prevent filibuster. That matter has been considered by the Procedure Committee. One of its suggestions which seems to have merit is that, at 2.30 pm on Fridays, private Members should be able to move that extra time be provided on a later Government day after 10 pm. That would go some way to redressing the balance between Government business and private Members' Bills, although not as far as I should like it.

At the moment, the Government of the day can crush without difficulty any legislation that they do not explicitly approve. The elderly people of this country who have lost the opportunity for savings against VAT on fuel deserve the ending of that systematic abuse. The children who, in the next few years, will be attracted to smoking, and the bereaved families of smokers who died from their addiction deserve changes to be made urgently to the Government's power over the business of the House.

The victims of the side-effects of drugs who were unable to judge for themselves whether to balance the benefits of drugs against their side-effects deserve the restoration of the sovereignty of Parliament so that it becomes more than just a slogan. The disabled people of Britain who have to face yet another day of systematic and institutionalised discrimination deserve the Government doing more than just paying lip service to our democratic institutions.

Hundreds of hon. Members are trying to represent their constituencies fairly and honourably, but they are being thwarted by the Government's obsession with their own dogmatic concerns and sectional interests. I ask that the House supports the motion which could lead us into a new era of enfranchisement, involvement and enablement—the true constituents of a real democracy. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

6.56 pm

Mr. Newton: With the leave of the House, I shall offer just a few comments on the debate, although obviously in a few minutes—I accept that I sought only a few minutes—I cannot comment on all the points that have been made, by any manner of means.

I understand why the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said what she did and, perhaps, why she did not wish to give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). One of the interesting aspects of this matter is that my right hon. Friend's Committee—I think that my right hon. Friend will confirm it—has received almost no representations whether from the Liberal Democrats or from elsewhere about the handling of private Members' Bills, but no doubt he will have heard with interest some of the points that have been made.

The only point that I make in response to the hon. Lady is that she might at least have acknowledged that the Government have made clear their reasons for concern about the practical consequences of the proposals in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and their concern to make positive progress, to the extent that the Government themselves will consult on a number of key matters in relation to discrimination against disabled people—for example, discrimination in employment, in access to goods and services, and in the provision of financial services. They will consult also on extending access provisions and creating a new independent body to advise the Government and to report on progress towards eliminating discrimination. That is an important and positive attempt to seek genuinely workable and practicable ways forward, and the hon. Lady might at least have acknowledged that in pursuing the controversy.

Many other points have been made. I was grateful to my right hon. Friend for acknowledging that he feels, as I do and as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) does, that it is important to make progress in this matter on the basis of consensus to the maximum possible extent. That has certainly been my approach.

We heard with great and genuine interest the cautionary notes struck by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) and others about how, sometimes, procedures that are regarded as arcane and complex are nevertheless an important part of hon. Members' armoury in pursuing their interests as Members. I say only—I see that the Liberal Chief Whip is looking anxiously at his watch lest I should talk the motion out, but that is not my intention—that some remarks made by the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) and some of my hon. Friends were less than gracious. Perhaps he gave the game away when he said that the problem was not the powers that the Government have given Select Committees or the efforts that I have made, but, and I think that I noted his comments right, that all that these Committees lack is the ambition of hon. Members to use those powers. That may or may not be the case, but it is a criticism not of the Government but of hon. Members.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 44, Noes 187.

Division No. 266] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Oiner, William
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rendel, David
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Nigel Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Callaghan, Jim
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Church, Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gillan, Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*

Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lewis, Terry
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madden, Max
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments).*

The House divided: Ayes 160, Noes 54.

Division No. 267] **[7.12 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bennett, Andrew F.
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lynne, Ms Liz
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*

O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
Rendel, David
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Terry Lewis and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government for its initiative in setting up the Select Committee on Sittings of the House (the Jopling Committee); supports the objectives of making agreed improvements in the House's hours of sittings and working methods; and welcomes the Prime Minister's recent statement reaffirming the Government's commitment to progress on parliamentary reform.

SPEAKER'S ABSENCE

Ordered,

That the Speaker have leave of absence on Friday 24th June to attend in her constituency upon Her Majesty.—[*Mr. Patnick.*]

Orders of the Day

Trade Marks Bill [*Lords*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 86

POWER TO PRESCRIBE CONDITIONS, &C. FOR MIXED PARTNERSHIPS AND BODIES CORPORATE

7.22 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 36, leave out lines 41 to 47.

The amendment reflects the fears of the Patent Solicitors Association that confusion will be caused by the use of the term "attorney". I understand that clause 86 originated from the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) and was moved in good faith. Let me say at the outset that I share the hon. Gentleman's laudable aim of finding for professionals who deal with trade marks a term that does not have negative connotations in the United States, France, Germany or elsewhere. Likewise, I share his aim of ensuring that litigation on trade mark matters is made cheaper and easier.

I would certainly welcome stronger support among Conservative Members for the key role played by the Patent Office and for Labour's fight to protect the excellent record of its workers. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who is in his place, has supported those workers.

The Patent Solicitors Association, which strongly supports the Bill, is highly critical of the introduction of clause 86 at a very late stage and at short notice. The association contends that the use of the term "trade mark attorney" will cause misunderstandings and even deception; that the word "attorney" implies to businesses and the public that the practitioner is a qualified lawyer, when that is not the case; that attorneys will be subject to discipline from professional bodies and ultimately the Supreme Court, when they will not; that they carry indemnity insurance, which they do not; and that they are trained in all aspects of the law and litigation practice, when they are not so trained.

According to the Patent Solicitors Association, the term "trade mark attorney" is not recognised in Europe. In the United States, an attorney is someone who is a qualified lawyer, and who has passed the exams of the state bar—a very different type of professional. Assurances have been given that trade mark agents are highly qualified by examination, but that is not the case. The register of members of the Institute of Trade Mark Agents reveals that only 38 per cent. of the members and fellows have passed the institute's exams. That means that of the 416 full members only 158 were so qualified while 258 were not. If those members, who form a majority in the institute, were to be known as attorneys, the public would be likely to believe them to be legally qualified when they were not and would consider them to be lawyers when they were not.

I do not seek to impugn the excellent work of the Institute of Trade Mark Agents, but I would welcome the Minister's thoughts on the reservations that I have

[Mr. Nigel Griffiths]

expressed, especially as other controversial clauses on unfair competition and lookalike products have been withdrawn.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I have listened with interest to the points that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) has made. His amendment would delete clause 86, but I am not convinced that we should follow that course. I do not recall any dissent in Committee from the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills), which would allow registered trade mark agents to use the title "trade mark attorney". It is important to remember that the full title, not simply "attorney", would be used.

Moreover, as hon. Members will recall from the Committee, I reported that the overwhelming view of the departmental standing advisory committee on industrial property following consultation on the matter was in support of such a move. Although registered trade mark agents may not have a general legal qualification or be qualified as solicitors, they are qualified in trade mark legal practice by examination or experience. Their names also appear on the register maintained by the Institute of Trade Mark Agents—the professional body which exercises control over them. As I said in Committee, what is at issue is the use of the title "trade mark attorney", not the use of the word "attorney" on its own. Therefore, there should not be any confusion in the minds of the public.

One of the hon. Members who took part in the debates in Committee was the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). I go some way towards agreeing with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South that the hon. Member for Newport, West follows such subjects closely and also follows closely what goes on in the Patent Office. He gave a broad welcome to the change that has been made. Indeed, it received a broad welcome from the Committee. I understand the reservations expressed by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South and his wish to raise the point, but I hope that he will not find it necessary to press the amendment to a vote.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Minister has clarified one or two points. Although I still have some reservations, I have no wish to delay the progress of the Bill. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

7.28 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have the unusual privilege of welcoming the Bill on behalf of all sections of the House. Indeed, industry has been crying out for years for the protection that we hope that the measure will afford. Trade marks are often one of the best assets of successful businesses. They reflect the investment in quality and service of the work force, the management and the design teams. The confidence that a trade mark can inspire will ensure that the public can shop with an assurance of quality and design. The sad fact is that there have been delays in bringing this legislation before the House—delays which have cost businesses revenue, hindered investment, cost jobs and are entirely the responsibility of the President of the Board of Trade and his Ministers.

In 1990, the Government published a White Paper, "Reform of Trade Mark Law", which responded to businesses' needs to register their trade marks for use in the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. It promised simplified procedures for registering trade marks and detailed improvements to detect businesses that held current trade marks.

Business reaction to the White Paper could not have been more favourable. Firms and individuals would save time and money in registering their trade marks. They would also have to spend less on bringing to justice those who infringe copyright, and loopholes in the law would be plugged, making it easier to secure a prosecution.

In summary, this is a measure which business wants and that will give better protection to business and the public. There is no rational explanation for the lengthy delay in enacting it. Ministers have failed to explain to the House, both on the Floor and in Committee, why it has taken more than three years for the Government to introduce legislation on such a widely supported measure.

There is only one word to describe the Government inaction and that is dither. Ministers have dithered for three years. The cost of their dithering has been borne by businesses and the public and it has been high. Present legislation, with its complexities and loopholes, is costing businesses around £30 million every year. By the time that the Bill becomes an Act, British businesses will have lost more than £100 million since the publication of the White Paper. It is a lame excuse for Ministers to say that there has been no time to legislate. I have studied more than 50 measures for which the Government found time to introduce primary legislation, and few merit the same priority as this.

Business has been very patient with the Government. The Bill contains items that were recommended by Sir Reginald Mathys's committee many years ago. We are now on the brink of putting in place safeguards for the 1990s for British businesses and entrepreneurs. Now the Government have decided to tamper with the civil service, which administers patents. Instead of reflecting on the damage done to so many public services by the attack on civil servants, Ministers want to treat them like some fast food franchise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), whom the Minister commended for his activities in highlighting the good work done by the Patent Office, warned the House on Second Reading and in Committee that if its work were tampered with further, the primary losers would be not be civil servants but the public and businesses that generate the wealth of the country. The uncertainty over the future status of the Patent Office has meant that when the European Commission considered where to locate its new office, it did not choose Britain, with a track record of a Patent Office that goes back 119 years, but preferred Alicante in Spain—an airport favoured by certain people who have made a lot of money out of trade mark goods, illegally.

Instead of listening to the concerns of enforcement officers in trading standards departments, Ministers are determined that those key consumer protection services should be split up. It is time for Ministers to listen to trading standards officers and their fears that unscrupulous traders, who infringe trade mark legislation, will still find

legal loopholes. Trading standards officers do not believe that the Bill goes far enough in plugging such loopholes, or that it ensures that seized counterfeit goods can be more easily returned for destruction, by bringing the law into line with section 100 of the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

My main regrets are that it has taken more than three years for the Government to introduce this uncontroversial Bill, that their delays have cost businesses more than £100 million and that the Bill still has some flaws. In order to give our inventors, businesses and the public some of the protections that they need, however, I commend it to the House, warts and all.

7.34 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) for welcoming the Bill. He made some of the usual taunts that we heard from him on Second Reading. He could not quite bring himself to give the Bill a general welcome and if he re-reads his speech in *Hansard* he will see that, if that is the voice of the new European Labour party, some of his comments about Spain will have to be tempered. Perhaps he is on the side of the section of the party of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) rather than that of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). However, I am grateful for his welcome for the Bill.

This is a complex Bill, but it is important to industry. I am grateful, therefore, for all the co-operation that has been demonstrated on both sides of the House in speeding its passage through the House. The Bill is a clear example of the Government's commitment to help industry and commerce. A company's trade mark can be among its most valuable assets and a major marketing tool in competing for business at home and overseas.

The Bill deregulates the administrative procedures surrounding the maintenance of registration and that will directly reduce costs for industry and commerce. The Bill will make it easier for a trade mark to qualify for registration and will give registered trade marks wider infringement rights. It will also enable the United Kingdom to ratify the Madrid protocol. All those changes will make it simpler and cheaper for industry and commerce to protect their trade marks, both in the United Kingdom and overseas.

In Committee, we made some changes to the Bill that will help further in that direction. A person who wishes to appeal against a decision of the registrar may, as an alternative to going to court, appeal to a person appointed by the Lord Chancellor, before whom he may be represented by a trade mark agent—or attorney, now—or a solicitor.

Another provision of the Bill that was amended in Committee was that dealing with counterfeit goods. Hon. Members will be aware that the Bill strengthens the protection against trade mark counterfeiting, but attention was drawn to a gap in its provisions as they related to the delivering up of counterfeit goods. We have closed that gap. It will now be possible for trading standards officers to seek forfeiture of goods seized whenever they can demonstrate to a court that the goods are counterfeit. That will enable them to dispose of goods that are clearly counterfeit. That is a positive and helpful change, which can only help trading standards officers in their determined efforts to combat trade mark counterfeiting. That was not part of the original consultation documents and would not have been in the Bill, but it has been included as a result of some court cases that we all know about.

During the passage of the Bill, much attention has been paid to the subject of lookalike products, which are allegedly got up or designed to look like those of brand leaders. Reference was made to that, both in this House and in another place. It was clear that businesses are divided on the question. Many feel that the present law provides insufficient protection against competitors taking advantage of the reputation of established products. Others, however, contend that the law is adequate and that special measures against so-called lookalikes would restrict legitimate competition and reduce consumer choice.

Even if one accepts the need for measures directed against lookalikes, it would not have been possible to deal with them in this Bill, which is about trade marks. A lookalike product may, in an extreme case, copy most of the features of a brand leader, but the one thing that it does not copy is the trade mark. As I said in response to a written answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), the Bill broadens the definition of what may be registered as a trade mark, so that distinctive attributes of goods, such as their packaging or shape, may be considered for registration as trade marks. The owners of such trade marks then have the right to take action for infringements against anyone using the same or similar marks on the same or similar goods.

The Bill should, therefore, be given a chance to work. If, once it has been in force for a reasonable period, it can be demonstrated that there continues to be a problem, the Government will be prepared to look again at the situation.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): If, after the period to which the Minister has just referred, the Government were minded to take action on the matter, in what context and form would they attempt to deal with it legislatively?

Mr. McLoughlin: I said that we will look at the matter after some time, but I cannot at the moment anticipate what will come out as a result of any inquiry that we decide is necessary. The hon. Gentleman cannot get any more than that at the moment because I believe that the Bill goes some way to meeting some of those concerns. I should just like to cover a few others points and the hon. Member may come back later if he wishes.

We certainly understand the points made by the major brand owners. While we are firmly in favour of robust competition, some of the examples of lookalike products do seem to be close to the boundary between what is fair in business and what is not. I would therefore like to warn the producers of those goods. If they continue to sail close to the wind, there will undoubtedly be pressure on the Government and, as I have said, we would look at the matter again.

I know that all hon. Members wish to see the Bill pass on to the statute book and come into force as soon as possible. In particular, there is pressure to bring into force those provisions of the Bill that deal with counterfeiting, so that they are available to trading standards officers to deal with the peak period for the sale of counterfeit goods in the run-up to Christmas. We are sympathetic to that call, and the Government will consider a timetable for implementation to determine by how much the planned date of 1 December 1994 can be brought forward.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I welcome that, because the Minister has gone half way. Does he recognise that there are two peak periods for counterfeiters? There is a peak sales period in August, which he has not mentioned, and one in December. Will the Government tackle the problems in August, which have been identified by the CBI and the anti-counterfeiting group?

Mr. McLoughlin: I know that this point does concern the hon. Gentleman. Amendments have been made and the Bill will not have completed its stages once we are finished here tonight. That will depend upon progress in another place. I am keen to see the provisions relating to that type of counterfeiting brought into action as quickly as possible.

I am grateful for the constructive and speedy way in which the Bill has been considered by the House. That speed has recognised the Bill's importance to industry and commerce, and to companies and small traders alike. A modern trade mark system is long overdue. This was a manifesto commitment two years ago and I am glad to be able to help discharge it. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Insurance

7.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I beg to move,

That the draft Insurance Companies (Third Insurance Directives) Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 24th May, be approved.

As with the previous measure, I am bringing before the House another useful piece of legislation. This, I am often told, is not characteristic of the Government's policies generally, in which case we may be breaking the mould today.

The directives that the regulations implement will be of significant benefit to the people of this country. We in the United Kingdom are fortunate, in that the system of prudential supervision in insurance which is established by the directives reflects our own system of supervision, based on freedom with disclosure. The directives in effect export our regulatory system to other member states, many of which have operated more restrictive systems than we do. One of the most important benefits of the directives—the easing of such restrictions in other member states, and hence the opening of their markets to us—does not therefore appear in the draft regulations that are before the House for approval tonight.

Having said that, I should explain that the directives do not harmonise the rules operated by supervisory authorities throughout the European Community, apart from a basic minimum. They rely instead on mutual recognition, which is much the best way of performing these functions. As such, they are consistent with the principle of subsidiarity.

The regulations are to be made under powers in the European Communities Act 1972 and mainly amend the insurance Companies Act 1982. Consequential amendments are made to the Financial Services Act 1986. They relate to the prudential supervision of life and non-life insurance—although in the case of Lloyd's some similar changes will be required to the byelaws.

If I were to attempt to give the House a detailed and blow-by-blow account of the purpose of each regulation, we should probably be here all night. Instead, I have provided the House with notes on the regulations, copies of which are available from the Library. I hope that hon. Members have found those useful. That leaves me free to highlight the more important provisions of the directives, and the implementing regulations, and to offer comment on what I see as the benefits that the directives bring to insurers and consumers throughout the Community.

The third insurance directives established the so-called "single passport" principle for insurance companies. That principle has already been adopted for banks and building societies. It will mean that any insurance company with its head office in a member state of the European Community may carry on direct insurance business through a branch in another member state, or provide direct insurance from one member state into another, on the basis of the authorisation that it receives from the supervisory authority in the state in which its head office is situated. For these purposes, that is called the home state. The immediate benefit of those arrangements for United Kingdom insurers is that, instead of having to comply with the often quite onerous supervisory requirements of each member state where they have a branch, they will only need to submit one return to the Secretary of State in respect of all their business.

Similarly, United Kingdom branches of companies with head offices in other member states will no longer have to submit returns to the Secretary of State. Another benefit is that companies will no longer have to submit their proposed premium rates and policy conditions for prior approval by the supervisory authorities in the member states where they intend to market their insurance products.

The single passport will not extend to companies whose business is restricted to reinsurance business, to certain small mutual companies that are below a specified threshold or to companies whose head office is outside the European Community.

For companies whose head offices are in the European Free Trade Association states of Austria, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and for life insurance companies whose head office is in Finland, the authority of the single passport will be valid throughout the 17 states in the European Economic Area once those states and the European Community have ratified the extension of the EEA agreement. This will require a further set of regulations in due course.

Companies that do not get the single passport will still be able to benefit from other changes in the regulations that I have made recently—notably, the ability to take into account the value of rights under new financial instruments such as derivatives and stock-lending transactions in valuing the assets that they must hold to cover their insurance liabilities.

The single passport procedures are set out in schedules 6 and 7 to the third directives regulations. Even in a single market, it is important for supervisory authorities to know which companies are carrying on business in their countries and for the companies themselves to know what laws will apply to them. The regulations therefore require that an EC company wishing to use its passport in the United Kingdom must be recognised. This means that the company's home state authorities must notify the Secretary of State of its intention to carry on direct insurance business through a branch in the United Kingdom, or to provide direct insurance into the United Kingdom, and supply the Secretary of State with certain prescribed information about its proposed business, its authorisation and its solvency. Similarly, a United Kingdom company must supply to the Secretary of State information about its proposed activities, which the Secretary of State will forward to the relevant authorities in the target member state.

A consequential amendment to the Financial Services Act will ensure that an EC company will be automatically treated as authorised under that Act in the same way as United Kingdom authorised insurers already are.

A fundamental requirement in the directives is that

"member States shall take all steps necessary to ensure that the competent authorities have the powers and means necessary for the supervision of the business of insurance undertakings with head offices within their territories . . . and for the purpose of seeing that they are implemented".

They must also take into account

"the need to ensure the sound and prudent management of an insurance undertaking".

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that it will be absolutely essential for the high standard and prudent supervision of insurance companies that Ministers in other member states can reassure British Ministers of the high standards of supervisory regulation and compliance? Otherwise there will be a danger of lower standards in those countries coming into this country by the back door.

Mr. Hamilton: I understand the fears of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), although they may be misplaced. The Commission will certainly take its policing role very seriously, as will the Government. I am perfectly satisfied that no dangers will arise as a result of our exporting our system of supervision into other parts of the European Community; in fact, that offers great opportunities for our insurance businesses to break into markets which, if not entirely closed to them, have at least placed many obstacles in their path. On the whole, this liberalising measure will be of great benefit not only to European consumers of insurance services but to British business consumers because of the extra competition which it brings. I do not underestimate the fears that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South has expressed. We will certainly be vigilant to ensure that the interests of the public are fully protected in the opening up of new markets that I have described.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Can my hon. Friend say clearly and objectively that the directives will ensure free trade for British-based insurance firms seeking to do business in life and non-life insurance? On the two previous occasions on which we have had directives that apparently secured free trade, we found, on inquiry, that all kinds of restrictions operated—between mass risks and large risks and also on the initiator of inquiries on life business. Will British-based companies really now have total freedom to seek life and non-life business on the continent—subject, of course, to the derogations obtained by Germany and Denmark?

Mr. Hamilton: My understanding is that the directives will open up the European market in the way that I have described. As the internal market Minister and deregulation Minister in our Government, I am very anxious to take advantage of those opportunities. I cannot guarantee that there may not be attempts to inhibit the working of the market. However, I can assure my hon. Friend—with whom I share many prejudices in this respect—that I will be particularly keen to ensure that the opportunities that I have mentioned are not in any way minimised. If any obstacles are placed before our companies to prevent them from developing in the way that I hope, the British Government will be foremost in seeking to use a crowbar to prise open those markets that may be partially closed to us.

The directives require member states to ensure that insurance companies are soundly and prudently managed —the point which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South raised. I have listed criteria for sound and prudent management in schedule 1 to the draft regulations. Although the criteria are not, for the most part, new, by bringing them together, I have given them a better focus and proper weight. I have also introduced additional powers enabling the Secretary of State to investigate companies and obtain documents for the purpose of ensuring that the criteria are complied with. Failure to comply with any of the criteria will be a ground for intervention by the Secretary of State.

I have also introduced provisions that will enable the Secretary of State to assist a supervisory authority in another member state to exercise its functions in relation to

[Mr. Hamilton]

the United Kingdom branch of an insurance company under its supervision—for example, by facilitating or assisting in an on-the-spot investigation, or by preventing a company from disposing of or otherwise dealing in any assets that it maintains in the United Kingdom.

In addition, I have introduced changes to the powers of the Secretary of State in relation to the authorisation of insurance companies. One new and important provision that I should mention is the power to suspend a company's authorisation in urgent cases—regulation 11. Although the Secretary of State already has a power to withdraw a company's authorisation, the new power will permit a more flexible approach. Companies will be able to make representations against the suspension and if, in the event, the concerns of the Secretary of State that gave rise to the suspension are unfounded, the suspension will be lifted without the need for the company to reapply for authorisation. Thus, the new power should be in the interests of policyholders and companies alike.

We emphasised in the consultative document published last December, and I emphasise again now, that these are reserve powers which I do not expect the Secretary of State to have to use unless genuinely necessary. In the vast majority of cases, United Kingdom insurers are soundly and prudently managed and in practice the provisions should have no effect on them.

A further requirement of the directives is that a person must obtain the approval of the relevant supervisory authority each time he increases his shareholding or voting power in an insurance company above one of several specified thresholds. To implement that, I have introduced the concept of "shareholder controllers", defined in terms of the percentage of the shares or voting rights that a controller holds. A person becomes a shareholder controller if he acquires a holding of 10 per cent. or more of the shares in the company, or is able to exercise 10 per cent. or more of the voting power at a general meeting of the company. Subsequent notifiable thresholds are at 20 per cent., 33 per cent., 50 per cent. and at the point at which the person becomes a majority shareholder controller. Notification and the approval of the Secretary of State is required on each occasion on which control is increased above those thresholds. Notification of decreases below the thresholds is also required.

Another important obligation in the directives, which is already placed on banking supervisory authorities, requires supervisory authorities not to divulge information that they have received in confidence in the course of exercising their functions without the consent of the originator; however, information may be disclosed to certain authorities without prior consent if the disclosure would assist that authority to discharge specified functions. Those permitted disclosures are listed in schedule 2 to the draft regulations.

The provisions on transfers of insurance contracts from one company to another have been revised. Under the principle of home state control, responsibility for authorising a transfer between two companies with their head offices in the EC rests solely with the home state, but is subject to the consent of other member states that have an interest. The rules are, however, unchanged in other cases. I have found it clearest to set out all the transfer rules in a new schedule to the Insurance Companies Act 1982 —schedule 3 to the draft regulations.

The changes brought about by the directives have provided an opportunity to review the assets that a company may value as cover for its liabilities. In line with developments in other financial services sectors, the directives recognise the increasing use of derivative contracts such as options, futures and contracts for differences, and also stock-lending transactions.

In response to requests from the insurance industry, I have, to a limited extent, deregulated the current provisions to give insurers new freedom to count the value of rights under such contracts as admissible, subject to conditions. Those conditions should go a long way towards ensuring that the severe losses that we read about from time to time, which result from inappropriate use of derivatives, do not happen in the insurance sector.

I have taken account of comments made in response to the consultative document about the proposed new treatment of debts. The regulations that I have made recently have been framed to meet those concerns.

I have also introduced changes to the rules on determination of liabilities to reflect the provisions of the directives.

The directives introduce new rules relating to the make-up of an insurer's required margin of solvency. Companies may take into account cumulative preference share capital and subordinated loan capital, known as "hybrid capital", up to prescribed percentages of that margin. I have not made provision in the regulations for the new rules on subordinated loan capital, as, for the time being, I intend to consider the proposed use of these instruments by companies on a case-by-case basis.

The measures should assist insurance companies, especially mutuals, to raise new capital and to compete effectively with other financial services sectors, while ensuring that their assets and liabilities continue to be prudently valued.

In due course, I intend to consult on further possible deregulation, for example in relation to the form and content of the annual return that insurance companies are required to submit.

A new requirement of the directives is that prospective policyholders should receive certain information about the contract before they enter into it. In the case of life assurance, some information must also be provided to policyholders during the term of the contract. United Kingdom life companies are already used to providing some prescribed information in relation to life policies that are investment contracts and thus covered by rules made under the Financial Services Act. The new requirements of the third life directive are not materially different.

An additional requirement, however, is that some information must now be given during the term of the contract. Some concern has been expressed by insurers, particularly about the requirement for annual disclosure of bonuses. While this is current practice in most cases, some contracts will be newly affected. I have therefore taken insurers' concerns into account in implementing the requirement, so as to minimise the cost of compliance. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important for consumers properly to understand the important aspects of their insurance policies, especially before they commit themselves. The regulations balance that objective with what I recognise is a burden on business.

Finally, on the scope of the regulations, I should mention the two new certificates that I am requiring. First, the directives require member states to

"require every insurance undertaking to have sound administrative procedures and adequate internal control mechanisms".

Although many companies do have fully adequate systems, others need to make improvements. Moreover, systems need to be progressively updated to ensure that they remain adequate.

In response to our original proposal to implement this requirement, companies expressed concern that an inappropriate form of certificate would lead to an escalation of audit costs, well beyond what could be justified by the benefits flowing from improved systems. In the regulations that I made recently I have reduced the requirement to a certificate listing the published guidance with which a company's systems comply.

I propose also that, from 1 January 1996, directors should be required to certify the general adequacy of the financial control systems that they have to meet the various regulatory requirements. I need to consult further on the form of such a certificate and will bring forward regulations in due course. This advance notice should prove adequate to allow those companies who need to make improvements to do so in good time.

The third life directive requires life companies to ensure that premiums for new business are sufficient, subject to certain conditions, to meet their commitments to policyholders. In addition to introducing that principle into the legislation, I am requiring the appointed actuary to certify the adequacy of the company's premium rates. It will be important to be able to confirm, in response to any inquiries that we may receive, that a company's rates are adequate, and the certificate should serve to provide that confirmation.

All member states are drafting comprehensive regulations along the lines of those that I have laid before Parliament. Some member states will implement the directives on time, as we will by the approval of these regulations; others, alas, will be late, although for some the delay may only be a matter of a few weeks.

Nevertheless, to ensure that there is no gap in regulation of United Kingdom branches of companies with their head offices in a member state that has not implemented on time, I have included a transitional provision that will allow the Secretary of State to continue to regulate such branches until such time as those states have fully or substantially implemented the directives.

The House has fully supported the single market generally and, in relation to these regulations, the single market for insurance in particular. As I said at the start, the directives reflect closely the United Kingdom system of supervision. With the abolition of prior approval of premium rates and policy wordings, and the reduced annual compliance returns, insurers will have more freedom to operate in the single market and offer the highly innovative and competitive products that they have been able to develop in the United Kingdom over the years. Although in practice there will be no big bang on 1 July, United Kingdom insurers have a lot to offer policyholders in the EC and, before long, the EEA.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend simply bear in mind—as he has sought to do—the fact that one of the difficulties for United Kingdom insurers competing with other investment products that are not insurance policies is that, even under the regulations to implement the third life directive, UK insurers will be required to produce ever more information, and we do not have an equivalent requirement for regulations to be provided by banks and buildings societies competing with insurers in the provision of investment products? Will my hon. Friend continue to look, as he has in drafting the Government's response to that directive, at the burdens of regulation on UK insurers?

Mr. Hamilton: I need not assure my hon. Friend that deregulation and the burdens that the Government can impose on businesses are at the top of my agenda. Naturally, we must strike a balance—as the Foreign Secretary often says—but the Government may pay attention to differing interests, and the protection of policyholders is vital. We must be certain that when we require firms to fill in forms and provide information to Government, that information is worth collecting and the costs that we impose are justified by the benefits to the public. I assure my hon. Friend that that technique has run throughout my consideration of how we might implement the directives. I am currently looking at a variety of ways in which we can reduce the bureaucratic form-filling burden imposed on insurance companies without prejudicing the wider interests of policyholders and others.

From time to time, particularly with the recent improvements in technology, it will be possible for us to streamline our processes of information obtaining, retrieval and use. I hope that, in time, the costs to insurance companies of the regulatory requirements that the Government impose will diminish. Compared to the current costs of operating elsewhere in the European Community, the highly deregulatory regime that will now be introduced will substantially reduce the costs of British firms. Because they have operated in a much freer, more flexible market in Britain over the years, they should be more nimble of foot and, perhaps, more surefooted in the development of innovative products than their potential competitors across the Channel. A combination of those two things should provide many profitable business opportunities for our companies.

I hope that these regulations will help United Kingdom insurers to remain strong and competitive in Europe through the introduction of home state control, and I commend them to the House.

8.4 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): There will be heartfelt relief in the financial centres of Europe that, on 1 July 1994 when the directives come into force, they will not have the effect of "Big Bang". We are all grateful to know that, as one Big Bang in the City of London in a lifetime is enough for us all.

The Minister's speech was interesting as he spoke about future regulation in relation to how derivatives affect the insurance sector. I am glad to hear that the Government are concerned about the derivatives market, which is a mystery to us all. Output options and share options can be hedged against different currencies and I surmise that the present fall in the stock market is indirectly caused by margin calls on derivative contracts in the United States. It is important to put on record on the Floor of the House our overall concern about the future of the derivatives market.

My response to the Minister's speech follows on from his winding-up of our previous debate on the second

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

directive. Those of us who have been through the first and second directives are now happy to be at the third one. When the Minister introduced the second directive, he said that the Government attached high priority to the completion of the single market in insurance. The second directive and the regulations that we are discussing represent a small but useful step. The Minister said that he looked forward to bringing before the House regulations to implement the third directive, which would grant a single passport to European Community insurers and make the single market a reality.

It is always a pleasure to follow the Minister and equally pleasant to speak on this directive without repeating the same speech as I made on the second directive. In creating a single passport for insurers, we are mirroring directives already in effect for banks and building societies. That fact might strike a chord with the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). It is now possible for three strands of our financial market—banks, building societies and insurers—to do business in other member states on the basis of the authorisation that they receive in their head office's member state. That will encourage, rather than detract from, the concept of bancassurance.

Over the past few years, we have seen how markets have been changing in that respect. Banks have set up their own life assurance companies; building societies have entered into alliance with life offices; building societies want to become banks; and a bank has even wanted to become a building society—or rather, take over a building society. As the directives flow together, we may see the continuation of the trend towards bancassurance. So, too, will the trend within the global economy of national insurance companies joining forces with continental insurance companies to get the best out of the single market through the directives.

We welcome the news that Commercial Union has sought to avail itself of the advantages of the single market by buying into France. It will obviate its need to enter the market of its own accord with its celebrated initials, CU, which have an entirely different connotation in France. Its acquisition of the whole of Abeille Assurance, the whole of the existing life assurance company, Abeille Vie, and 50 per cent. of the new life assurance business coming through AFER, the French savings association, show the advantages of the single market.

The Minister said that the House has generally supported the single market in the years since the Single European Act 1986. Certain sectors of the House have misunderstood it, but it has received a friendly welcome overall. In the dynamic modern economy that is to deliver opportunity to all its people—not merely to a limited number—as advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), we have no hostility to bancassurance.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman has drawn our attention to a specific company's recent acquisition of a French company, but I am sure that he would wish to take the opportunity of joining me in congratulating a range of UK insurance companies which, for many years, have developed interests on the far side of the channel. Several life companies, including one that I used to work for but in which I have no continuing interest, have for many years had extremely detailed links with, and in some cases ownership of, continental insurance companies and/or savings institutions.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for the intervention of the hon. Gentleman and for the fact that companies in Germany, Italy and France have involved themselves in our country and have bought into insurance companies here. There is therefore a two-way traffic as a result of the single market and we see that, in an ancient phrase but one which is nevertheless useful, we take in each other's washing when it comes to insurance and we both benefit from the free market.

On the bancassurances, we wish gently to point out to the Government and the Minister that we must worry a little about the consequence of the horizontal mergers or takeovers where the result of such takeovers is that the financial markets are dominated by no more than six or seven of the largest producers and distributors of financial products. Although we have all agreed on the Floor of the House that it is important that the single market should be continued and balanced and that we should all benefit from it, it does not yet offer the celebrated level playing field.

Many insurance companies seeking to make a major move into continental Europe have to be sure of the route that they are taking. Acquisition is one route; going it alone is another. The essential element of a successful penetration of the continental European insurance market is access to distribution—not unlike in our own market. Many of the major broker networks are tied in to existing insurance companies and banks are increasingly moving into the insurance business, so new entrants find it extremely difficult to establish a major foothold.

In relation to the earlier intervention of the hon. Member for Blackpool, South, aided and supported indirectly by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), there are other elements to the so-called level playing field. Protection—that pariah to the free market—can also raise its head and may be written into the single market through differing tax regimes. They may reduce the ease with which insurance products can be transported across borders. They may indirectly protect the home market for the local insurance player. Local legal requirements, as regards policy wording and the form of cover that insurers need to provide, are but one further complication that insurers attempting to move into the new market must confront.

Notwithstanding the single market, therefore, the home team, as with most home teams, will continue to have an advantage simply because it is the home team. The footballing cogniscenti are no doubt widespread in the Chamber tonight—we are, after all, no doubt watching the world cup, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said from a sedentary position. In terms of the level playing field, it is rather like Yeovil Town playing Sunderland at home in the FA cup. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) tut-tuts from a sedentary position, but I am sure that as a Whip he wants us all to get home early tonight and would not wish to prolong my speech by provoking me into extending it.

The directives before the House amend mainly, as the Minister said, the Insurance Companies Act 1982 and they also make consequential changes, which were the words that he used, to the effect of the Financial Services Act 1986. We can see that the home member state shall be

solely responsible for the control of an insurance company's financial position, including compliance with solvency margins, technical provisions and matching requirements.

I notice that I have mentioned the phrase, "solvency margins" and the Minister said that those directives would have some impact on byelaws at Lloyd's of London. This is the time of year when we are told that we should be worrying about the solvency margins of Lloyd's. This is the time that we are told that Lloyd's may be in a meltdown situation. This is the time that accountants begin to worry whether Lloyd's is in full compliance with its solvency margins. I am always reassured to know that Lloyd's has about £6 billion of assets and that it can meet its solvency margins many times over, but it is right to reflect on the anxieties that are felt and there is no better place to reflect them than the Floor of the House of Commons.

Lloyd's is an important—an integral—part of our insurance market. It is an integral part of the City of London. We wish the Lloyd's management well in their endeavours to put the past behind them and to get on with the future, but it is right to place on record many of the anxieties.

I was discussing the supervisory requirements in the directives and the ways in which they will affect the regulation of insurance companies whose head office is in our jurisdiction. We are all aware, and I think that we would all agree, that the Government have made a dog's breakfast of their regulatory regime. Yet that is the regime that should govern the substance of the directives. Is it self-regulation? Is it independent regulation? Is it statutory regulation, all regulation being underpinned by the Financial Services Act 1986, which is being amended tonight? Or is the subject too perplexing? Even the City of London had become divided.

Those people who will do business in our country under the directives will know that when it comes to their margin requirements they will look to the Department of Trade and Industry and its 90 or so insurers' supervisors, but to whom should they look to regulate their package of products and the marketing of those products?

We have the Personal Investment Authority. The proposal to establish the PIA has been in the ether for about three years and it has managed to spend about £6 million even before it opens for business. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said that it might now be appropriate for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce legislation putting in place direct regulation, which would have the advantage that those continental European insurance companies wishing to set up here under those directives might know how they will be regulated. I can only repeat the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central in the debate on private pensions:

"The time has come for us to recognise that direct regulation is necessary. By direct regulation, I mean regulation by the SIB which would be answerable to Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 30 March 1994; Vol. 240, c. 1027.]

Reverting to the subject of the PIA, it is my view, and that of Her Majesty's Opposition, that it has yet to satisfy many of its would-be members that it knows the difference between aims and methods, training and competence, costs and standards, public interest and commercial interest, whether they have a prospectus or a game plan, a consultative document or an indicative document—in short, that it knows what it is doing. The question whether the Department of Trade and Industry should be responsible for insurance supervision or whether that supervision should be part of the work of an overarching statutory organisation is perhaps a debate for another day.

If I may quote my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield again—we are all anxious to have it on record that we are quoting him left, right and centre at this time—

"We have to set out a new economic agenda for what will be very shortly a new millennium".

There will have to be a full debate on statutory regulation of the City of London. That will be a part of a new economic agenda as to the appropriate way of regulating our insurance industry, within an overarching framework of statutory regulation.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman consider, when calling for statutory regulation, that the much-vaunted statutory regulation of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States did not stop a large number of extremely complex, and costly to consumers, frauds happening in the USA? He might wish to consider whether statutory regulation, as opposed to the Securities and Investments Board here, would therefore be any answer.

Mr. Bell: I am happy to inform the hon. Gentleman that, in the first instance, we would not propose a full SEC. As for the second, it was through the SEC that the whistle was blown on the Guinness affair. The statutory regulation had a serious consequence in that context. It also would have ensured that there would be no prospect of the sort of catastrophe that has occurred at Lloyd's in the past few years.

As you are in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker—as alert as ever—I do not intend to wander too far from the subject of the directives. We are grateful to the Minister for keeping his promise of 12 January 1993. We are glad to see that all member states are introducing the enabling legislation and that France, Portugal, the Netherlands and possibly Denmark and Germany expect to implement the regulations by 1 July. We noted the Minister's hope that other states would follow. We can only say that the mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small, even in terms of regulation through the European Community —or the European Union. Other member states will follow in the next two to three months.

It has long been the ambition of the much-maligned European Commission to make it possible for insurance companies established in any member state to provide services freely throughout the European Union. It has long been the Commission's ambition for insurers to be subject to similar controls in each of the member states where they might wish to open offices. It has long been its ambition for policyholders to have a wider choice of insurers, and to be able to cover their risks—wherever they are situated within the Union—through the insurer of their choice. For the United Kingdom, those ambitions have come closer tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Insurance Companies (Third Insurance Directives) Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 24th May, be approved.—[*Mr. Kirkhope.*]

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

VOCATIONAL TRAINING: LEONARDO DA VINCI PROGRAMME

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4187/94 and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Employment on 23rd May 1994, relating to vocational training (LEONARDO DA VINCI programme); shares the Government's view that appropriate transnational actions on vocational training can add value to national training activities by enabling exchanges of best practice; and endorses the Government's view that such actions must be cost-effective and fully in line with subsidiarity, in particular as regards consistency with the recognition in Treaty Article 127 that member states are responsible for the content and organisation of vocational training.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 3rd May, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

INDUSTRIAL TRIBUNALS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Industrial Tribunals Extension of Jurisdiction (Scotland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 10th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Industrial Tribunals Extension of Jurisdiction (England and Wales) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 10th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

AGRICULTURE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) Scheme 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 1302), dated 13th May 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th May, be approved. —*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Ordered,

That Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes be discharged from the Select Committee on Members' Interests, and Mr. William Etherington and Mr. Andrew Mitchell be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

LIAISON

Ordered,

That Mr. Andrew F. Bennett be added to the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Sport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

8.22 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I rise to address a packed Chamber at what I would normally describe as a late hour, but tonight I have to describe it as a ridiculously early hour. *Hansard* would pick up my lie if I said that it was late when in fact it is particularly early. I know that that is welcome to hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I do not wish to extend the debate until 10.30 pm, as I could do if I wished. I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that, although I intend to take a little time, I do not intend to take as much as that.

I am pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls) is present, as I know that a constituent of his has a problem similar to the one that I am about to describe. I hope that the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey), who is concerned about issues relating to this, will also be able to speak if I finish early.

I wish to examine the position in which a constituent of mine finds himself, and to highlight a major problem in the way in which the Football Association conducts itself. An intolerable trading environment has led to a complete lack of free market—not a position that I would expect the Government to support. The Football Association has two positions simultaneously: it is both poacher and gamekeeper, watchdog and profit-maker. It can exclude people from the marketplace, while at the same time entering that marketplace to promote its own products, which may or may not have sponsorship.

Oddly enough, I have received a large amount of post since I took up the matter and secured this Adjournment debate. I confess that I was surprised by the interest engendered by something as small as an Adjournment debate among ordinary people around the country and others involved in businesses. They have written to me drawing attention to difficulties faced by those who want to get their products into the marketplace but are forced to abandon their objective because of the intransigence of the Football Association.

My constituent, Steve Aldridge, received the UK patent for a game called Futbolito—a mini-football game—in 1989. The concept comes from South America, and has been used there. Having seen the game, I believe that it provides a stepping stone to the real game of soccer, giving children basic skills and an understanding of all the necessary features of the game. It is played by small teams using small goals that can be set up outside in limited environments such as playgrounds, or even on playing fields.

In 1989, my constituent contacted the Football Association to ask for consideration to develop the mini-football game for the benefit of the national game. He was told by the FA's director of coaching, Mr. Charles Hughes, that pursuing the project could be of no particular value to the FA; that was after some examination of it. My constituent, however, continued to believe that there was a genuine need and demand for the game, and went on to launch Futbolito in 1992.

In April 1992, my constituent received a letter from the FA saying that it was going to launch mini-soccer, which would be the only—I stress the word "only"—approved game for youngsters in the six to 11 age range. The game

was to be sponsored by Coca-Cola, which I think sets the matter in a slightly larger perspective. Coca-Cola also promoted and sponsored the national soccer show in 1993, at Birmingham's national exhibition centre.

Interestingly, one of the problems encountered by my constituent was the fact that both he and his product Futbolito were prevented from being present. He gathered later on, and I have discovered, that Coca-Cola wanted the mini-football that it had sponsored to have exclusive rights at the event. Only after it withdrew its sponsorship did the organisers tell my constituent that he could demonstrate his game and attend the show. My constituent's problems continue—a catalogue of problems, which illustrate the fact that the FA has a tremendous amount of power. It seems that, with just a nod and a wink, it can restrict the possibilities for people such as my constituent to pursue their rightful business interests.

Despite oral and written approvals of my constituent's teaching and coaching aid by FIFA, and an oral approval of the equipment by the English Schools Football Association, the Referees Association and others such as the Bobby Charlton soccer school, the FA still denies approval for the product. The irony is that in many discussions the ESFA gave my constituent plenty of assistance, expressing the view orally that the equipment was perfectly all right and that it hoped that he would receive FA approval. In trying to secure written approval from the English Schools Football Association, my constituent wrote some 20 letters, but the association did not reply. It was happy to talk on the telephone, but it never put anything in writing. I suggest that that indicates a certain fear of what might happen should it break the line and state in writing that it considered the product good.

My constituent has never sought sponsorship or other finance from the FA. He really only wants approval for his game, so that he can go out and compete with other products in the market. The only product that is FA approved at present happens also to be the FA's product.

Since being denied the FA's approval, Mr. Aldridge has been virtually put out of business. Were it not for his tenacious attitude in making the project work, by now he would have gone under. He has been invited to demonstrate his product at certain venues, in particular at the start of a football match in Yeovil in August 1992 and, later that month, in Loughborough. However, on both occasions he was told at virtually the last minute that he could not demonstrate his product.

Having been refused approval for his product, Mr. Aldridge has found it virtually impossible to demonstrate Futbolito. It appears that once the FA discovers that he is about to demonstrate his product, it find ways to contact the organisers and sponsors and—surprise, surprise—the invitation to demonstrate is hurriedly withdrawn.

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): The dismal and worrying catalogue of events that have beset my hon. Friend's constituent have been almost exactly reflected in the experience of one of my constituents, Mr. Mickey Clarke who lives in Egham. He invented a similar mini-football game and has been treated disgracefully by the FA. My hon. Friend the Minister has been given the facts and I know that he is considering them carefully.

The case of my constituent adds force to what my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) has said. Something should be done. The Football Association seems to be omnipotent. If it were a commercial company it would be outlawed by the Office of Fair Trading. Indeed, if it were trading across European Community boundaries it would be fined heavily by the Commission. Perhaps the OFT could do something. I certainly support my hon. Friend in all that he has said.

Mr. Duncan Smith: As my hon. Friend clearly explained, his constituent has a problem similar to that of my constituent. Indeed, his constituent has also written to me with copies of his correspondence—not because he expects me to check up on my hon. Friend, but because his case bears such a remarkable similarity to the issues surrounding my constituent's problem. I know that my hon. Friend has assiduously pursued his constituent's case, probably with much the same results as I have achieved on behalf of my constituent. I wish my hon. Friend's constituent the very best of luck, although I gather from the correspondence that he is having tremendous difficulty getting any results. Indeed, he is probably shorter of his objective than my constituent is.

The main problem for my constituent relates to demonstrations. On one occasion he was prevented from demonstrating Futbolito at an English Schools Football Association event literally as he was about to go on to the pitch. After a series of telephone calls from the Football Association, the ESFA was left in that hazy area of not being told directly "thou shalt not", but having it made quite clear that if it were the FA's decision, it certainly would not do so. I gather that in the football world that is tantamount to saying, "Don't do it." The ESFA then withdrew my constituent's invitation as he was about to go on to the pitch to demonstrate the product. Yet before inviting him it knew that he did not have official FA approval. The truth is that the FA did not like the fact that my constituent had been invited to demonstrate his competitive product.

It is difficult for my constituent to promote his product to schools. Imagine his position. He writes to a school and suggests that he goes there to demonstrate his product or talk about it. The school—especially if it is an inner-city school—looks at his literature and thinks the product is a good idea. Then the person reading the literature realises that he does not have FA approval, or perhaps in conversation with him they ask, "Does this product have FA approval?" The answer is no, in which case they say, "Well, we shall probably look instead at the FA approved products," little realising that in fact there is but one approved product, which also happens to be the FA's product. The schools do not understand all that; they simply look for the FA badge of approval. That is right because they want something approved on the grounds that it is reasonably safe and is a good game that teaches children the right skills. That is what they are looking for, but it is not the essence of why FA approval has been withheld.

The FA makes money from its approved version of mini-football. It also sells a variety of other things over which it has control of approval. Like Futbolito, the FA is a limited company and therefore quite legitimately—I do not criticise this—seeks to make a profit from its mini-football game. However, it has a massive advantage as it can at the same time—this is my major point—deny its competitors the official approval that it gives to itself.

There are differences between the two games. One is smaller than the other and in one sense they do not directly compete—yet still approval is not given. What is the FA so

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

scared of that it refuses to give my constituent an opportunity to compete in the open marketplace? What is so much to be feared that my constituent cannot be allowed to demonstrate his game so that those wishing to buy a game can make a decision on whether his is worth the money, whether it is a good game, whether it is cost-effective and all the other aspects that consumers take into consideration in making a choice? Instead, only one product is available.

I do not want to go into detail about who stole whose idea. That is always a grey area. I am not saying that the FA set out to steal my constituent's idea, although there are disputes on the margins about when its product was devised and whether it got the idea in some part from my hon. Friend's constituent or from mine. The real point is that there should be a proper, competitive marketplace, but the FA is preventing that by refusing people such as my constituent a fair crack at selling their products.

My son and daughter attend an inner-city school in London, which has a limited tarmac playing area about half the size of the Chamber. It would be perfect for my constituent's product, but would not be right for the FA's larger mini-soccer product. Such schools are denied the opportunity to consider Futbolito and therefore to encourage their children to kick a ball around.

I am passionate about the concept of team sports, as is my hon. Friend the Minister. I criticise both this and past Governments for laying less and less emphasis on the need for children to compete with each other, learning what it is like to win at the same time and, more importantly, learning what it is like to lose—to learn to live with failure as well as with success. The best way to do that is go out and kick a ball around or, in the summer, to hit a cricket ball—the sort of things that we used to enjoy doing when we were young, but which are now rarely available for children. They spend far too long sitting in front of computers playing computer games; they have forgotten what it is like to compete.

We must try to reverse that trend. My hon. Friend the Minister is one of the great supporters of the concept of team sports. This debate is not just about my constituent, although his case is vital; it not just about the fact that we no longer have a proper, competitive marketplace, although that is also vital; it is about the fact that at the heart of the problem there is a sickness that affects the way in which we can draw talent from all our children. It is no wonder that we find it difficult at times to get people into coaching and into senior sides and end up producing a side in England, Scotland, or Wales that does not go off to the world cup.

It is ironic that I am holding this debate tonight when I watched television on Saturday night and applauded the Irish for their fantastic effort in beating the Italians. I applauded them because they showed every bit of the determination and drive that we should have done in this country. I do not necessarily blame just the players; I blame the whole system and at the heart of that system is the Football Association, which illustrates that sickness by the way in which it has behaved towards my constituent and others.

I must press my hon. Friend the Minister on the matter because we need to do something about it. I am the last person to say that something must be done, but I have to say it in this case because we have a problem. It is not only about sorting out how football is played, but about the fact that there is a lack of competition in that marketplace. We are allowing the Football Association to act almost as gods. My hon. Friend and I have had considerable correspondence on the matter. Although the Government's position is that it is not their place to interfere in the matter, and I understand that argument, the booklet about mini-soccer states:

"The sponsorship of Mini-Soccer by Coca Cola Great Britain has been recognised by an award under the Government's Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme for Sport, 'Sportsmatch', which is administered in England by the Institute of Sports Sponsorship."

It appears, therefore, that we are putting some money towards the product. I am not questioning whether that was right or suggesting that this sponsorship is in any way is wrong. I am questioning the decision that we should do nothing when clearly something needs to be done. We have an entrée because we gave the FA—reasonably enough, it would be appear—sponsorship to deal with the problem of getting children on to the pitch to play football, so let us ensure that there is proper competition and that there is not unfair use by the FA of its position.

I believe that there needs to be a separation between the FA's right to approve products and its right to produce products for itself. Let us start there. Let us find a way to separate those powers and we may see a Football Association which moves forward to protect and encourage the game across the country. We must do that and get those basics right, because my constituent, who worked very hard and put up a large amount of money to try to get his product off the ground, is being forced towards bankruptcy because he cannot get a fair shot at the market. Most people listening to or reading the debate would think such a situation absurd and I demand that we do something about it: some mechanism must be found to get inside the FA and sort it out.

8.42 pm

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) for allowing me a few moments to speak in the debate. I congratulate him on his persistence in trying to get the topic discussed, because, under the rules of the House, it has been extremely difficult. However, we now have a useful debate raising the subject of the Department of National Heritage's responsibility for sport.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I shall not take advantage of the fact that we could talk for another hour and three quarters on this topic or widen my remarks too much to go into the Department's responsibility. However, the topic raised by the hon. Gentleman is a useful opportunity to raise one or two points about the Football Association generally, for which the Minister, in his responsibility for sport generally and, especially, for football, which is the national game, loved and cared for by so many millions of people, has ultimate responsibility, even though the FA is responsible for the game.

I agree whole-heartedly with the hon. Gentleman and his views on Futbolito. I have also been involved—obviously not as much as the hon. Gentleman—with the case. I also know about the other case to which the hon. Member for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls) referred.

However, I shall raise first an issue of concern to me: the scheme called Soccerfun. It is also a new, innovative

scheme, which was devised by Mr. Terry Densham. It is in a similar situation, although it has not quite gone to the length of the case about Futbolito. It is also a game for five to seven-year-old boys and girls in family groups. It has been developed, there have been many meetings and it has been started following meetings in Leeds, Watford and Manchester.

The Junior and Family Football Supporters Association asked Soccerfun to introduce sessions to eight clubs during the summer of 1992. It was proposed, if the scheme was successful, to provide the other 67 major football clubs with the results and to recommend the introduction of Soccerfun. The condition, once again, was that the FA had to give approval in writing. Unfortunately, in spite of repeated attempts, meetings and discussions, two years later a dialogue is still continuing, but absolutely nothing has happened. It is just another example of the way in which the FA use its power to control and its power to divide and decide what it wants to do and what is in the best interests of football.

I think that the average person in the country who cares about football would say that the last body in Britain that could organise, care and understand football is the FA, because it has had a series of failures. If people are absolutely honest, they would not blame the England players or even the England manager, but they would blame the system in this country and the FA. The FA is responsible for football in the country and it has not served the game or the supporters well.

There has recently been quite a lot of publicity about the charges and penalties as a result of the difficulties and scandals happening in football, especially relating to the problems at Tottenham Hotspur. Much as I want to see the underhand dealings, the kickbacks, the bungs in the envelopes and such matters sorted out, the way in which the FA has responded and dealt with the problems at Tottenham Hotspur has not done the attempts to get to the bottom of the matter any good whatever.

I remind hon. Members that the FA set up a commission almost a year ago to look into those charges of financial dealings and nothing happened for months and months. Finally, the only occurrence has been that the chairman of Tottenham, Alan Sugar, went to the FA and produced some of the background, which he had found out since he joined the club—I do not want to get into the difficulties between Alan Sugar and Terry Venables—and there was no doubt that Tottenham came clean with the new chairman and produced as much documentation as they could. As a result, the club has been very badly treated. There is no doubt that it should have been fined, although, interestingly, the person responsible for most of the matter —Irving Scholar—is sunning it in the south of France and getting away with absolutely everything. The very least that the FA should have said was that Irving Scholar should have absolutely nothing to do with any football club and should never be allowed to have anything at all to do with football in this country. It has not even said that.

The FA has taken the easy route out. It has punished the supporters; those people who pay their money week in and week out to watch Tottenham, when the team have not been doing especially well and when they have been doing well. Those people have paid their money on wet and cold nights and they have been punished. Indeed, the entire club is being punished for something for which the people who are curently running the club are not responsible. It is extremely unjust. It raises the question whether a vendetta might be being waged by the FA against Tottenham in particular because of the difficulties that there were between Terry Venables and Alan Sugar. It would not do now, of course, given that Terry Venables has been appointed the manager of England, for him to be in any sort of difficulty. We must question whether the FA is prepared to get to the bottom of the financial irregularities. It should be taking a much more serious view and not picking on one club and using it as a scapegoat.

The FA should be setting up independent tribunals to examine the ways in which players are sold from one club to another. There should be an independent tribunal system. There must be a great deal more control of agents. There was the ridiculous situation over the past few days concerning Eric Hall. I do not think that any player in this country would want Eric Hall to represent him. On the other hand, there are some good agents who are willing to be regulated. They are willing to put all their financial dealings through the FA. The association should be taking the lead from the good agents who want to work properly for the players.

The FA fouled up the appointment of the England manager. It is to be questioned whether it is capable, as constituted, of running the game. It is all very well saying that it is the governing body of soccer and we should leave it to run things.

Soccer is an important part of our sporting and cultural life and it matters what is happening to it. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Minister to be aware of who is running the FA. Who are the sort of people who are running it? Is it good enough to have people like Charles Hughes running the coaching system? The Minister should adopt a much more hands-on approach. He should be doing much more to knock heads together, to lay down guidelines and to insist that certain things are done. Ultimately, the average soccer supporter has only the Minister to help to change things. I hope that he will take on board some of the changes that are necessary.

The way in which the FA has handled the television coverage of soccer is disgraceful. It has allowed television companies to decide when matches will be played. It has played into the hands of people who are interested only in making money. I recognise, of course, that clubs need to be financially sound. We want clubs to have sufficient money to enable them to buy players, for example. In the present climate, however, it is the ordinary punter who is suffering once again. I am talking of the person who goes along to a match, pays his money and tries to watch football. He has to go through the hoop to watch matches on a Monday evening. He travels long distances and pays large amounts of money. Such circumstances should not have been allowed to develop.

One of the problems is that football is being run by people who are still living in the past. They have not moved into this century and they are certainly unprepared to move into the next. They are not in tune with the modern game. We have a responsibility in the House to take an interest in what is going on.

Another problem is that many people, including some hon. Members, do not like criticising the FA because they like getting free tickets. It is wrong that, even in the House, we cannot make it clear that we think that there is a great deal more that could be done to clean out the game and to ensure that it is run by people who have an interest not only

[Ms Kate Hoey]

in the players but in the supporters and, most important, in setting standards and targets that will mean that England will be able to qualify for the next world cup.

The current problems lie not with the players or the standard of play but with those who are running the game and with the way in which it is being run. It is not being run in the interests of the players, and certainly not in the interests of supporters.

Sir Michael Grylls: The hon. Lady referred to free tickets. I dissociate myself from the general proposition that Members have free tickets. I have never sought a free ticket and I have never been offered one. Indeed, I do not want one.

Ms Hoey: I was not referring to the hon. Gentleman, to the hon. Member for Chingford or to the Minister when I talked about some people wanting free tickets. I feel that there is a cosiness, however, about the FA and the establishment generally that runs football in this country.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The problem lies with those who might want the odd free ticket—this is very much part of what I said earlier—and do not want to say something that might mean, whatever they are doing to run their end of football, that the FA might suddenly be breathing down their necks, saying that next time something comes up and it has the power to make a decision, it will decide against them. The problem extends right the way up to what the hon. Lady said about Spurs. It seems that those who are running the organisation see it as their personal sinecure. They seem to think that favours can be granted or not according to whatever is in their interests. It is an outrage and something must be done about it.

Ms Hoey: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is a cosy establishment complacency that is based on how things were run in the past. The FA is not representative of those who understand football. It has no representative from the Professional Footballers Association. There are very few representatives who have come from the professional game. There is a ridiculous system of ticket allocation. On FA cup day, those who have followed the two teams right the way through often find that they are unable to get tickets for the Cup Final because so many of the tickets go to others who have no direct interest in the two clubs.

Perhaps it is just as well that I did not realise that we would have so much time to debate these issues. With that knowledge, I would have prepared a 45-minute tirade against the FA. I shall, however, sound a warning to the Minister. I am worried about the European championships that England will be hosting in 1996. I am delighted that that is to happen, but I am genuinely worried whether the FA has the capacity to organise the championships in a way that will maximise the benefit to the United Kingdom, including the supporters and football generally.

I am concerned because the FA still refuses to listen. It always acts too late. It reacts only when things have already happened. It is important that the Minister keeps a close eye on how the FA is working towards the championships. I am not talking about problems that relate to hooliganism, for example. Surely we want to maximise a sporting festival for people in this country and others throughout the world. I have grave doubts about the FA's capacity to do that.

I hope that the Minister will pick up the particular case which this debate is all about, because it is quite wrong that the buck can be passed. The Office of Fair Trading says that the case has nothing to do with it. The Minister responsible for sport says that it has nothing to do with him and the FA continues to get away with basically being the judge and jury. I hope that this debate, short as it is, will give the Minister something to get his teeth into. I am sure that he will welcome doing that.

8.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): May I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on his good fortune in securing this Adjournment debate and on the persistence with which he has followed this case? He was in touch with my predecessor as Minister responsible for sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), and he has spoken and written to me about it. His constituent should be glad, if for nothing else, for the hard work that my hon. Friend has put into this important case.

I am also very glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls) who is, typically, also in his place. He and I have had discussions and exchanged correspondence over many months about a similar case affecting his constituent called Mr. Mickey Clarke. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his hard work on behalf of his constituent.

I am also glad to see the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) in the Chamber. I congratulate her on the astute way in which she broadened this debate, entirely of course within the proper boundaries. She used the fact that we happened to begin the debate rather earlier than expected to set out many interesting and wide-ranging propositions. I assure her that I will study what she has said extremely carefully.

I will answer in more detail in just a moment the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford about his constituent Mr. Aldridge. The hon. Member for Vauxhall said that she hoped that she had given me something to get my teeth into. She has certainly done that.

I have listened very carefully and with great interest to the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford for Mr. Aldridge and I entirely agree that Futbolito appears to be a well-intentioned scheme for participants of all ages and for a wide range of users such as qualified football coaches, teachers, local community sports developments officers and football clubs at all levels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford will know that the concept of Futbolito originated from Colombia where football is played with a small ball on a pitch the size of a basketball court. I understand that Futbolito is already played in around 300 schools and by 19 professional clubs in this country and that it is the intention, as the scheme develops, to introduce local, county, national and, ultimately, international Futbolito championships.

My Department does not, of course, have any jurisdiction to intervene in the day-to-day affairs of properly constituted governing bodies of sport such as the Football Association. As my hon. Friend the Member for

Chingford will be aware, the role of Government is to support and encourage the development of, and participation in, sport through appropriate policies and expenditure programmes. The Government do not, and should not, run sport.

From our previous correspondence and from correspondence with my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford will be aware that Mr. Aldridge's complaints about alleged anti-competitive practices by the FA have been fully investigated by the Director General of Fair Trading. In October 1992, following allegations that Futbolito demonstrations had been banned by the football authorities, the Office of Fair Trading made inquiries of the FA and the English Schools Football Association and the director general was satisfied that there had been no transgression of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976.

The director general also concluded in January 1993 that the FA's action had not breached the relevant competition legislation—the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the Competition Act 1980. Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, the Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to review commercial activities in the United Kingdom, identifying possible monopoly situations. Where criteria are met, he may at his discretion refer such situations to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for investigation.

Under the Competition Act 1980, the director general may also investigate courses of conduct pursued by individual organisations that may be anti-competitive. I understand that he does not have powers to take up complaints on behalf of individuals; nor can he make judgments on what is fair, unless they raise concerns for competition in the wider context of the market as a whole. The director general was not persuaded that Mr. Aldridge's case raised such concerns.

Hon. Members will know that four home country associations are responsible for football, each of which covers the school, amateur and professional aspects of the sport. The FA, formed in 1863 as the governing body of football in England, is responsible for an enormous range of activities at every level of the game. More than 43,000 clubs are affiliated and the FA has a crucial role in ensuring a healthy and successful base for the national game.

Over recent years, the FA has expanded its activities and stepped up its commitment to the development of young players and the need to invest in the future of the game. The FA's programme for excellence has led to the creation of centres of excellence attended by more than 8,500 students between the ages of nine and 14. The development of that programme has been possible only because of the Football Association's determination to establish a financially secure base for its work. More money is now available to be directed at the grassroots of the game, where the long-term future of the sport is being secured and underpinned by the Football Association in partnership with a range of other agencies.

More than 100,000 children are coached annually on courses approved by the Football Association and by qualified FA coaches. They participate in a range of schemes, including the soccer star scheme, which is a skills award scheme for boys and girls aged six to 16; the preliminary soccer star scheme, which is for children with disabilities and learning difficulties; and in fun weeks, which are non-residential and residential holiday courses. The FA also runs mini-soccer, which brings me to the subject at the heart of the debate.

It is my understanding that the FA views its scheme, which was launched last year, as an extension of its existing coaching programmes. The aim is to provide a football introduction to boys and girls, with a view to developing a lasting interest in the sport. While developing the scheme, the Football Association has been assisted by a number of other sporting bodies that have recently developed specific schemes to attract the interest of the young. That includes the National Cricket Association, which initiated kwik cricket; the Lawn Tennis Association, which was responsible for the introduction of short tennis; and the Rugby Football Union, which was responsible for mini-rugby.

In partnership with Coca-Cola, as my hon. Friend mentioned, the FA has encouraged clubs, schools, sports centres and youth clubs to open up as licensed mini-soccer centres to create a nationwide network in which children can play safely under supervision. Mini-soccer is the only competitive form of football approved by the FA for under-nines, and it is the recommended game for all under-11s. I understand that the FA will not sanction any leagues, cups or tournaments; it believes that, at those young ages, the game is a sufficient challenge in itself. The FA believes also that mini-soccer can provide a valuable curriculum resource for the games module of the physical education national curriculum for boys and girls in mixed teams.

The FA is also involved in a series of special projects to encourage participation by certain groups of young people. Those include girls-only coaching courses, a new "football challenge" Duke of Edinburgh award, which is aimed at inner-city areas, and a series of coaching courses for police officers working in areas of high deprivation.

I believe that the Football Association and Mr. Aldridge have the health of football and young people at heart. In common with all hon. Members, I very much hope that their efforts will bear fruit.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HILL SAMUEL BANK AND UNITED DOMINIONS TRUST BILL [*Lords*].

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Exports

1. **Mr. Deva:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the level of defence exports in 1993.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): Defence equipment orders in 1993 were in excess of £6.6 billion.

Mr. Deva: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there are some 65 companies which are sub-contractors to the defence industry in my constituency? What is he doing to help them export more?

Mr. Rifkind: I am conscious that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have large numbers of companies, both contractors and sub-contractors, in their constituencies which are very much influenced by defence exports and defence industrial requirements. For that reason, we can all be satisfied that the United Kingdom is second only to the United States in the success that it has had in defence exports. That has not only provided substantial employment for this country, but has been of considerable benefit to our armed forces as a whole.

Mr. Clelland: Does the Secretary of State agree that an important influence in encouraging foreign governments to buy British is for our own Government to do just that? Will he confirm that it is his intention to end speculation and to order a further 200-plus Challenger 2 tanks from Vickers Defence Systems?

Mr. Rifkind: We recognise the importance of the defence needs of the armed forces to the United Kingdom's industrial requirements. Some 90 per cent. of the defence procurement budget is spent in the United Kingdom with United Kingdom companies. We are not yet in a position to announce further orders for Challenger tanks; we will do so as soon as we are able.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, as long as we continue defence exports on such a major scale, it is in our interests also to subscribe to those initiatives sponsored by the UN and others for humanitarian rules in such exports? That will mean that companies such as Computing Devices Ltd. in my constituency will be able to continue to offer employment to my constituents in that field.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, we attach importance to the considerations that my hon. Friend rightly mentions.

Deregulation Initiative

2. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact on his Department of the Government's deregulation initiative.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): My Department is playing a full part in the Government's deregulation initiative, putting particular emphasis on streamlining contracts procedures and improving communications with industry.

Mr. Prentice: Is not the deregulation initiative not so much about cutting red tape as about cutting costs and imperilling safety and security? Will the Minister assure the House today that there will be no change to the current arrangements for providing fire cover at defence establishments such as Porton Down and Aldermaston?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood the nature of the Government's deregulation initiative. It is not to do with cutting costs, although we have often hoped that the Government-wide initiative will result in less red tape and will therefore remove burdens on industry. In relation to defence, I can assure him that safety remains paramount and that we do not envisage cuts that will imperil the safety of any members of the armed forces.

Mr. Luff: Can my hon. Friend give any details of what he is doing to streamline the contracts and procedures to which he referred in his first answer?

Mr. Aitken: We have a number of initiatives planned. In particular, we will be carrying out a major review which will result in new guidelines for industry being published. The whole point of the changes is to simplify and streamline and make it easier for industry to put forward bids and win contracts from us. We are also offering, in many cases, longer-term contracts which will give greater stability to industry itself.

Training Centres

3. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reductions are planned in military outward bound type training centres; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Separately from the defence costs study, my Department is planning to study the scope for maximum efficiency and rationalisation of adventurous training as part of a wider review of how and where Army-sponsored training is conducted.

Mr. Llwyd: Does the Minister agree that the joint service mountain training camp at Tywyn in my constituency is an excellent establishment? Does he also agree that, as a result of last year's consultation on staffing, things have been a little shambolic between the Ministry and the employees? Given that a tri-service review is being

conducted, the results of which will, I understand, be announced in July, does that mean that the future of the camp will then be known?

Finally, if and when redundancies have to be made, do I have the Minister's assurance that proper consultation will take place according to the recent landmark decision at the European Court of Justice?

Mr. Hanley: I was a graduate of Morfa camp, Tywyn, and I enjoyed my time there very much. I cannot, however, give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks because the adventurous training study has been removed from the defence costs study and will be considered over a slightly longer time scale than that provided for the latter. The decision on the exact provision of camps that we will need in the future will be made during the summer or in the early autumn, not with the defence costs study.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend congratulate the 3rd Battalion of the Staffordshire Regiment on running outward bound courses for young people in Staffordshire and the west midlands? Is my hon. Friend aware that only last Saturday I abseiled down the Roaches, with the battalion, in the Staffordshire moorlands?

Mr. Hanley: I had heard of my hon. Friend's great courage in abseiling down. As was explained to me, he showed that not only do we have the technology, but he does, too, to survive such an experience.

Merchant Vessels

4. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many merchant vessels are currently available to the United Kingdom for defence purposes.

Mr. Hanley: Vessels are chartered on the worldwide market, so naturally availability varies from day to day.

Mr. Davies: Is it true that during the Gulf war only five of the vessels that were chartered were British? What kind of deal did the British Government get out of the charter costs involved in that exercise?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is right—out of 156 vessels that were chartered during Operation Granby, 151 were foreign flagged. Not only that, but during Operation Grapple, which is taking place now on the Adriatic, all the 18 ships that have been chartered are foreign flagged. One reason for that is the success of the British merchant fleet in having contracts from which it would not wish to resile. Surely our armed forces should make sure that they get the best value for money for the ships that we need to hire.

Civilian Employees

5. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian employees there are in the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Aitken: The total number of civilian personnel employed by the Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1994 was 143,700.

Mr. McAllion: Is the Minister aware of the concern among some MOD civilian employees at the proposal to establish a military home service engagement battalion, consisting of redundant ex-service men, paid off as part of the Government's defence cuts, which may lead to job losses among MOD guards? Will the Minister therefore give an absolute guarantee to the House that whatever the Blelloch report recommends, there will be no reduction in the staffing of the newly formed MOD guard service?

Mr. Aitken: All that I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that the matter is currently under study. It is not possible to give him an answer at this stage.

Mr. Wilkinson: How can the proposal to build new headquarters for the Procurement Executive at Abbey Wood, near Bristol, which will house hundreds of civilian personnel, be in tune with the "Front Line First" proposals that my hon. Friend is currently examining? Should not Her Majesty's forces now be able to procure direct from industry rather than having to deal through this expensive bureaucracy?

Mr. Aitken: We are certainly casting our eagle eye over any aspect of the MOD which could be described as excessively bureaucratic. The headquarters are also being considered as part of our defence costs study and I cannot anticipate my right hon. and learned Friend's statement at this stage.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister apologise for the deliberate leaking from his Department of the findings of the defence costs study, which is likely to mean the loss of 22,000 jobs, including many civilian jobs? Does he agree that those who work on military bases can have no faith in the Ministry of Defence's consultative procedures? For example, at RAF Carlisle recently, the trade unions put up a viable alternative to closing the base, but the Minister treated it with contempt and used it as an excuse to hold back a decision until after the European elections. Is not consultation a sham under this Government?

Mr. Aitken: That little diatribe was full of rubbish, as I have come to expect from the hon. Gentleman. First, if he thinks that Ministers deliberately leak the unwelcome information and speculation that appears in the press, he needs his head examined. It is the last thing that we would do. Secondly, he is ill-advised to cast doubt on the sincere and honourable consultation procedures, which we always implement in full and will continue to implement once the results of the defence costs study are announced. We will honour those consultation procedures. Finally, the hon. Gentleman is wrong about defects in the consultation procedure on the item that he mentioned.

Mr. David Shaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are a number of civilian employees at the Royal Marine school of music based in Deal? Is he also aware of the considerable unemployment in the Dover and Deal area and that one way to solve that problem would be to announce the setting up of a combined defence school of music based in Deal?

Mr. Aitken: I am certainly aware of the facts which my hon. Friend mentions, not least because I live in the Dover and Deal area and my constituency boundary is adjacent to that of my hon. Friend. We also share the same local newspaper, in which he is well recorded on those matters. I shall consider his ingenious suggestion, which is part of the defence costs study.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Minister consider the position of some civilian employees in Northern Ireland who were formerly with the Property Services Agency, but, because of the circumstances there, were recently transferred to the

MOD? I refer particularly to some ladies who have given many years of loyal service in difficult circumstances. They are currently being declared redundant—not because the job has disappeared—and the readvertising of the post has been done in such a way as to deprive them of a real opportunity of applying. Will the Minister look into that injustice to remedy it?

Mr. Aitken: Yes, I will look into the point which the hon. Gentleman raises. I was unaware of it until now, but if he will be good enough to send me details, I will look sympathetically at the matter.

Departmental Land

6. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the total area of land in the United Kingdom owned by his Department.

Mr. Hanley: Just under 600,000 acres of freehold and leasehold — including foreshore — as at 1 April 1994.

Mr. Foulkes: While I would normally welcome the disposal of defence land, will the Minister assure us that one disposal that he will strongly resist is that of Rosyth naval base, as that would not only devastate the economy of Fife, but would undermine our defence capability and represent a betrayal of all the promises given by the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box when we discussed Rosyth dockyard?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to answer that question because a specific question later on the Order Paper deals with exactly that point.

Mr. Viggers: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in constituencies such as the one that I represent at Gosport, the Ministry of Defence owns as much as a third of the land? It is therefore crucial that, when land is released, there should be the closest possible discussion between the Ministry of Defence and the local authority. Will he confirm that the pattern set by Lord Cranbourne over the release of a small portion of land at Leigh-on-Solent will be followed when the Ministry releases land?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. His local authority of Gosport has an excellent record of co-operation with the land service of the Ministry of Defence. We shall co-operate with every local authority before land is disposed of. That is in the interests not only of local authorities and people who live in the area, but the Ministry of Defence. We are trying to reduce our land with each passing year. It is good financially for the Ministry of Defence, which made a net reduction last year of 1,389 acres, and the sale of more than 12,000 acres is currently in the pipeline.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the Minister consider the land on which Devonport dockyard stands? Does he recall that last year the Secretary of State for Defence, who is sitting beside him, said that only 350 jobs would be lost at Devonport, whereas the reality is nearly 2,000? Is his Department incompetent, or was he deliberately misleading the House?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. The job losses that the management announced last week were the result of efficiency measures that they had introduced. Therefore, my right hon. and learned Friend has kept his word entirely. I should have thought that an accusation such as that on his birthday was below the belt.

European Union

7. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have been held within Western European Union of defence relationships with countries applying to join the European Union.

Mr. Rifkind: At their meeting in Luxembourg on 9 May, WEU Ministers expressed their willingness to strengthen contacts with the four acceding countries to the European Union. One of the four, Norway, is already an associate member of WEU and participates in its discussions.

Mr. Taylor: Given that the countries that join the European Union, including those in central Europe, have the right to join WEU and the mutual security guarantees, has my right hon. and learned Friend considered the security implications of which countries should be invited to join the EU?

Mr. Rifkind: The countries of central and eastern Europe that have shown an interest in the European Union have already been admitted as associate partners to WEU, but I emphasise that that does not involve their participating in the security guarantees. That would be a much more fundamental reform, whether it would apply to WEU or to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and could only be part of a much more long-term consideration of their proper relationship with the countries of WEU.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Secretary of State accept that many of the eastern European countries that have become associated with WEU now believe that they have received a form of security guarantee which, he will accept, western Europe in its present condition could not deliver? Does he accept that there has been some carelessness on the part of Ministers—not necessarily British alone—in accepting that arrangement without being able to provide any form of guarantee whatsoever?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that there is no formal treaty guarantee. Having said that, of course we have an interest in the security and stability of all the new democracies of central and eastern Europe, including those that have become associate members of WEU. However, it is necessary to distinguish between a legitimate interest in their security and stability and formal treaty guarantees, which have not been provided.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that the European Parliament would be of any use to WEU?

Mr. Rifkind: It is clear that WEU is to provide the basis of closer European co-operation, because it is crucial that any such co-operation is complementary to our obligations to the Atlantic alliance and does not in any way undermine them. Therefore, we do not envisage a role for the European Parliament in that area.

Bosnia

8. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his EC colleagues about the situation in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence regularly meets ministerial colleagues from EU nations to discuss matters of mutual interest, including the situation in Bosnia.

Mr. Mullin: Can the Minister give an assurance that British and EEC troops will remain in Bosnia until there is a comprehensive settlement? Is he satisfied that British troops in Bosnia have been receiving adequate back-up from the United Nations? I am thinking of a couple of incidents last month—one in which Serb tanks were permitted to run through the Sarajevo exclusion zone and another in which the arms of British soldiers were confiscated and their commander was obliged by the Serbs to read out a humiliating statement.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman points to two instances which we greatly regret. However, during my visit there last week, when I spent three days in Bosnia and on the Adriatic, I discovered that the position has changed dramatically for the better. There is now an almost comprehensive peace throughout the middle of Bosnia, the ceasefire between the Croats and the Bosnian Muslims is sticking and the cessation of hostilities along the confrontation line is managing to be sustained. There are occasional instances of firing, either of mortar or small arms, but the work that our troops are doing there is still extremely important and valuable. Due to their work, we have probably saved hundreds of thousands of lives in the time that we have been there. While decisions have still to be taken, we shall continue to do that good work for as long as necessary.

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that if there has been an improvement—which we warmly welcome—it is because the Serbs at last believe that we mean to hold firm to our resolve to keep the safe areas safe? Will he ensure that the Serbs are never again given the false signals that allowed them to bombard Gorazde?

Mr. Hanley: I believe that an element of realism has broken out on all sides of the conflict. I hope that the relative peace that exists now will lead to a comprehensive peace. The only form of peace that we can have in the Balkans is one at a political level between politicians. We cannot enforce a military solution there, but we can do much to help in the meantime. I believe that my hon. Friend is right in his analysis.

Army

9. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the size of the British Army.

Mr. Rifkind: I intend to maintain and, where possible, enhance the planned fighting strength of the British Army.

Mr. Enright: Does the Secretary of State recall that the Select Committee on Defence described as scandalous the amount of support that existed for the Challenger 1 tank fleet? Will the defence costs study make that even worse?

Mr. Rifkind: On the contrary—one purpose of the defence costs study is to ensure that we have the resources available so that the armoured strength of the Army, as well as the other services, can be accommodated in a proper and effective way, thereby enhancing the Army's fighting strength.

Mr. Butcher: Does my right hon. and learned Friend feel that the political situation in eastern and central Europe is more or less stable than it was five years ago? If he shares my suspicion that there are trends in eastern and central Europe which may ultimately be dangerous to western Europe, what implications does he believe that will have for the size of the British Army in the future?

Mr. Rifkind: Five years ago, there were several million Warsaw pact soldiers in the centre of Germany, just 48 hours away from the low countries and the English channel. Today, Russian troops are a thousand miles further east and the Warsaw pact no longer exists. Therefore, although my hon. Friend is right to remind us of the great instability, uncertainty and fragmentation in Europe, I believe that, overall, the threat to the peace of Europe is considerably less than it was five years ago.

Mr. Macdonald: Will the Secretary of State confirm the value to the royal artillery and the economy of the Western Isles of the testing and training range at Balivanish in the Hebrides? Will he confirm that if he is seeking savings in the operation of that range, they can be found by contracting out work to civilian labour, while retaining the base and its contribution to the island economy?

Mr. Rifkind: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, those matters are currently under review. I am acutely conscious of the contribution that the range makes to the local economy in Uist and Benbecula and I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. We hope to bring to an end as soon as possible the uncertainty affecting the range and other comparable facilities.

Mr. Garnier: How do our plans for the British Army compare with those of the French Government for their army?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that in terms of their fighting strength the armies are comparable. The French army has a large conscript element, so its manpower is considerably greater than that of the British Army, which is entirely professional. I believe that the British Army's fighting capability remains, man for man, the best in the world.

Rosyth

10. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further consideration he has given to the position of the Rosyth naval base; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Rosyth is designated as a base for minor war vessels and as the location for a number of other defence activities. These provide civilian local employment of around 1,300, as well as for Royal Navy uniformed personnel. The future of the royal naval base is being examined—along with other naval bases and naval infrastructure—as part of the "Front Line First" study. I expect to announce final proposals next month.

Mr. Salmond: Everyone in Scotland is aware of why the Tory Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) wants to close Rosyth dockyard, but why should the Tory candidate for Monklands, East this morning say of the naval base that it was yesterday's installation unable to meet the demands of tomorrow? Can we have some candour from the Secretary of State? Has an effective decision been taken to close Rosyth naval base? If it has not, why is the Secretary of State for Scotland clearly preparing politically for its closure instead of fighting for its survival?

Mr. Rifkind: No decision has been taken on the closure of any defence facilities in the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member has been campaigning for years for the effective closure of the Faslane base on the Clyde, along with the thousands of jobs associated with Polaris and Trident, he is in danger of giving humbug a bad name.

Mr. Ian Bruce: If, sadly, the Government decide to close Rosyth as a naval base, will my right hon. and learned Friend revise the decision that was made after the last time the Government decided to save Rosyth—they decided then to move operational sea training away from Portland—particularly as I understand that the latest studies into the cost effectiveness of moving flag officers' sea training show that there are fewer savings available and more costs than were originally thought?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend's question is, of course, speculative, but I should say to him and the House with regard not only to Rosyth naval base, but to all naval establishments and infrastructure, that the criterion that I shall apply—and it is the proper criterion—is the need of the Royal Navy to ensure its fighting capability in the years to come. The Royal Navy clearly needs to ensure that its resources are used to maximise its fighting strength; whether in regard to bases or other facilities, that must be the criterion to apply.

Ms Rachel Squire: Does the Secretary of State agree that in 1991 commitments were made by the Government to a continuing and important role for Rosyth naval base for the defence of this country? Does he also agree that only last year he announced that the rescue co-ordination centre for the whole of the United Kingdom would be RAF Pitreavie? Will he today announce his commitment to a future for both Pitreavie and Rosyth?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady is aware that the "Front Line First" study is considering these matters. As she knows, I cannot give her the conclusions today. Not only are we conscious of the important contribution that Scotland has made to the defence needs of the United Kingdom, but I have not the slightest doubt that Scotland will continue to make a crucial contribution to meeting the defence needs of the United Kingdom and providing the defence infrastructure for that purpose.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my right hon. and learned Friend be less churlish and more warmly welcome Opposition Members' apparent conversion to the cause of strong defence, ignoring, of course, the irony that only a few years ago they were calling for 25 per cent. reductions in our defence and for chucking away the nuclear deterrent? Is it not ironic that, now that the cold war is over, not least because capitalism has beaten socialism, they now think that we should be armed to the teeth?

Mr. Rifkind: Not only is my hon. Friend correct, but the defence review called for by the Opposition would lead not only to savage cuts in defence support, but make unsustainable the front line on which the effectiveness of our armed forces depends.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does not the closure of the Rosyth naval base raise a number of strategic issues of profound and irreversible importance? Is not the likelihood that if the Rosyth base is closed it will never be reopened? What evidence is there that the Government have conducted the strategic review with our NATO allies that is necessary in order to determine the consequences for our and their maritime defence if the base is closed?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. and learned Gentleman can assume that, in giving the Government advice, the Royal Navy has first addressed the question of its strategic requirements with regard to the use of naval power. That, of course, must be the first question to be asked and it is indeed the way in which the Royal Navy has approached these matters.

Dr. Reid: When the Secretary of State tells us that no decision has been made about Rosyth, no one in Rosyth, in Scotland or in the House believes him. If he wishes to prove that he is correct, will he today give us the categorical assurance that he refused to give at our last Defence Question Time and promise the House that all the figures for the costing of naval support will be placed before, and debated in, the House before a decision to close any base—including Rosyth—is made? If the Secretary of State cannot give us that categorical assurance today, it will not only be another betrayal of the people of Scotland but an open admission that he is not in charge of the review process and that the commander-in-chief of cuts is the First Lord of the Treasury.

Mr. Rifkind: As the First Lord of the Treasury is the Prime Minister, it is not unreasonable for him to have some influence on these matters.

The hon. Gentleman's empty rhetoric is not relevant to the issues that we are discussing. He can assume that any decisions that are reached in regard to any defence establishment in the United Kingdom will be accompanied by proper consultation, and a proper explanation of the basis on which those decisions have been reached.

Iraq

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest assessment of aerial photographs taken by Tornado aircraft since 23 March over the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates; and what action he has taken since the visit of the hon. Member for Linlithgow to meet officials at his request in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 23 March.

Mr. Hanley: We continue to take aerial photography of southern Iraq. This shows widespread drying out of the marshes, the diversion and drying out of the River Euphrates and the burning of villages and reed beds.

Mr. Dalyell: How do the interpreters know that the burning that is taking place is any different from the burning that has been carried out by the madan for at least 5,000 years, for hygiene reasons? I found the Ministry's interpreters profoundly unconvincing.

Mr. Hanley: I know that the hon. Gentleman believes that the burning of roofs and buildings that we have seen is the result of attempts to cure local health problems. The extent of those health problems must be massive. I know that he also believes that the draining of the River Euphrates is nothing more than an agricultural project; if that is so, it is a massive agricultural project. I can only say that honest, independent people have concluded from the evidence that these are the actions of the Iraqi Government, who are deliberately trying to harm the Shia marsh Arabs.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Can the Minister explain why the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) does not realise that swallowing the poisoned propaganda of Saddam Hussein leads to a total destruction of the intellect just as swiftly as the thalium poison pumped into the prisoners whom he releases from prison leads to the destruction of the body? Does not the hon. Member for Linlithgow understand how appalling the cruelty is? Perhaps we in Parliament now have a Lord Haw-Haw in our midst?

Mr. Hanley: I recognise that my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) have both seen the same evidence, and have reached diametrically opposed conclusions. I can only say that the evidence of the military is more in line with my hon. Friend's views than with those of the hon. Gentleman.

Air Cadets

12. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number of boys and girls in membership of the air cadets in the years (a) 1979, (b) 1989 and (c) 1992.

Mr. Hanley: Since 1979, the number of air cadets has remained constant at around 49,000. Whereas there were no girls in the air cadets in 1979, there were more than 9,000 in 1989 and just over 11,000 in 1992.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Can he confirm—bearing in mind "Front Line First" and the interests of the air cadets—that an important aspect of recruitment and retention is flying and gliding experience? Will that be taken into account in "Front Line First", so that there is no reduction in the number of air cadets?

Mr. Hanley: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who devotes a great deal of time and effort to helping the air cadet organisation. A key objective of the organisation is to provide young people with flying experience, and there is no intention to lose sight of that. Every air cadet currently has an opportunity to fly, and will continue to be given that opportunity. I hope that my answer has helped to reassure my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Banks: I was a flight sergeant in the air training corps, and look how I ended up! Would not it be better to encourage our young people to join the Scouts, Guides, Cubs, Brownies or Woodcraft folk and to teach them about getting on with people and about peace and love rather than preparing them for war?

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom's cadet forces provide a useful service. In inner cities, they give excellent training to many young people who find it difficult to have any other structure. I have a sneaking suspicion that the hon. Gentleman's high-flying days were long ago.

Arms Sales

13. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to how many countries Britain sold arms during 1993.

Mr. Aitken: In 1993, British defence equipment manufacturers received orders from 90 foreign countries.

Mr. Alton: Will the Minister reject and repudiate once and for all the curious notion that the morality of how a weapon is used has nothing to do with the salesman? Does he agree that it is high time that Britain published a blacklist of countries to which we will not sell arms because of their record of human rights abuses?

Mr. Aitken: The United Nations embargoes on countries that, for one reason or another, are considered unsuitable recipients of arms are published. As further evidence of transparency, we subscribe to the new UN register on conventional arms transfers, which makes apparent any breaches of the UN list. The export licensing system ensures that each and every arms transfer is considered on its merits, and human rights and the possible purposes for which arms may be used are taken into account. The hon. Gentleman's point has been understood.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend give every consideration to the export potential of the European FLA Hercules replacement? Does he agree that its potential export sales could be as high as £7 billion?

Mr. Aitken: A great deal of loud and persuasive lobbying has taken place in relation to the potential exports of that aircraft. At this stage, however, it is only a paper aircraft, so it would be impossible and unwise to predict the potential for exports. I hope that they will be high once the aircraft is built.

Mr. Donald Anderson: One country to which we have steadfastly refused to sell arms is Bosnia. By contrast, as the Minister wells knows, the United States House of Representatives has passed a binding resolution in favour of a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo and the setting aside of £200 million for the United States to purchase armaments for Bosnia. What will the Ministry of Defence, in co-operation with our European colleagues, do to speak loud to senior senators to try to ensure that the UNPROFOR mandate is not undermined?

Mr. Aitken: We have made our views known to the United States Administration and to Capitol Hill, but the United States Congress, like the House of Commons, is a sovereign legislature, and both must be respected.

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for lifting the arms embargo on Israel, which will make it easier for the British arms export industry. Does not he think it strange that those who call for greater help for manufacturing industry are always willing to make snide and sniping comments about the record of our arms exporters?

Mr. Aitken: The Government welcome the considerable change in the political situation in the middle east as a result of the recent accords, which have made changes, such as the lifting of the arms embargo, possible. We welcome it and I am glad that my hon. Friend does so, too.

Defence Procurement, Europe

14. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about progress towards common European defence procurement.

Mr. Aitken: Progress towards a common system of European defence procurement has been slow, but we work closely with individual European partners on specific collaborative projects.

Mr. Hutton: I acknowledge the benefits of European defence collaboration in projects such as the common new generation frigate programme and the Eurofighter programme, but will the Minister make it his policy to ensure that any moves towards greater European defence procurement will not be at the expense of further erosion of our defence industrial base, especially the shipbuilding sector?

Mr. Aitken: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that the first requirement for defence procurement decisions must be our national security and our national interests—and we will stick to that.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that some of us used to love playing with paper aircraft, and that when he referred to a paper plane earlier, he meant a plane on paper? Will he assure the House that no decision will be taken on replacing the transport until FLA has been properly evaluated?

Mr. Aitken: We are certainly receiving a great deal of information on possible plans for the future large aircraft, but we must bear in mind the fact that the replacement of our transport fleet—certainly the first tranche—will be necessary before the future large aircraft is likely to have come into existence. That may depend on whether we can choose the refurbishment option or a new-buy. Whatever happens, FLA will not be ready for the first tranche of our fleet replacement.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Robathan: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the real concern throughout the country caused by the continuing reduction in our defence capabilities, as illustrated yesterday by the leak about the defence costs study? Can he reassure his hon. Friends that he will never allow the growth of expenditure on social security to undermine our national security?

The Prime Minister: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the "Front Line First" programme will do nothing to reduce the fighting effectiveness of our armed forces or our ability to undertake defence commitments. I assure him that our commitment to effective front-line forces remains undiminished. The purpose of the "Front Line First" study is to ensure that money spent on defence administration and support is kept to a minimum. That is a sensible aim, and I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will join me in achieving it.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the Prime Minister confirm that a member of his staff attended a crucial meeting of the Railtrack board last weekend?

The Prime Minister: A member of my policy unit attended a meeting in Whitehall, at the invitation of the Department of Transport, in order to inform me. The negotiations are between Railtrack and the unions. As the right hon. Lady raises the question, perhaps she will now take the opportunity, at the third time of asking, to condemn the strike.

Mrs. Beckett *rose—*

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mrs. Beckett *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House will come to order.

Mrs. Beckett: I think that we can take that answer as a yes, so we now know that the Department of Transport interfered in the negotiations, although it said that it had not, and that the Prime Minister's office meddled in the negotiations, although it said that it would not. Does not it stand out a mile that the dispute would not be happening if the negotiations had not been sabotaged by the Government?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady is being ludicrous. The policy unit attends meetings throughout Whitehall, with a watching brief. It takes no part in negotiations that, as the chairman of Railtrack has made clear, are between him and the unions. However much the right hon. Lady tries, she cannot hide the fact that she will not condemn a strike that puts hundreds of thousands of commuters at risk, when hundreds of thousands of other public service workers have settled for pay increases, far below 3 per cent., which can be afforded. As ever, she is the strikers' friend.

Mrs. Beckett: What is completely clear is that no one wants this strike—*[Interruption.]*—except, perhaps, Conservative Members—least of all rail staff and commuters. Is not it crystal clear that it is happening only because the Government interfered? Yet again, the Prime Minister has caused what he now condemns. Yet again, the Government are saying one thing and doing another. Is not that why nobody can believe a word they say?

The Prime Minister: This has happened because there is an 11 per cent. wage demand which, by implication, the right hon. Lady would accept. Even now, her condemnation is limply to say that nobody wants this strike; she will not condemn it. She would, presumably, end it by meeting the demand. She backs that extra spending. I remind her that last week, she criticised tax increases. A week later, she calls for more public spending. How would she pay for the settlement—by raising taxes, by increasing public expenditure? The hypocrisy in this case rests with the Opposition. The right hon. Lady still will not condemn the strike. To quote her, that is twice she has refused to answer on condemning the strike. Will she now condemn it, yes or no?

Q2. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gillan: Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 40 per cent. of those recently arrested as part of Operation Bumblebee were on bail? Does not that underline how wise our Government are in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must settle down.

Mrs. Gillan: It will not have escaped the House that the Opposition find law and order so funny. How wise the Government were to crack down on bail bandits in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. As three out of five burglaries are committed by people who are under 21, perhaps the Opposition would care to explain why they oppose policies against juvenile offenders so consistently. Is not that proof that the Labour party is Fagin's friend?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend has shown with the figures she has used, there is no doubt that far too many people have been abusing the right to bail. Once the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill becomes law, a person who is charged with a serious offence committed on bail will lose the right to bail. That is entirely right. If that person is then convicted, the court can reflect the fact that the offence was committed while the person was on bail. Operation Bumblebee has been a huge success. It has shown that by targeting crime, one can bring it down. What is equally encouraging is that the last quarter's crime figures show crime down by 9 per cent.

Mr. Ashdown: Does not the atrocity in Loughinisland over the weekend prove that when it comes to evil, there is nothing to chose between the murderers on one side of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland and the murderers on the other? I remind the Prime Minister, once again, that the gunmen thrive when a political vacuum exists. Will he confirm that he understands the importance, when he meets the Irish Prime Minister in Corfu on Friday, of regaining, again, the initiative for peace through political progress in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that the murder of six people in Loughinisland on Saturday evening was a vicious and depraved act of brutality. Whether it is so-called Loyalists murdering Catholics or the IRA murdering Loyalists, it is equally indefensible by any possible measure. The right hon. Gentleman is right to stress the need for political movement and political settlement. I am in constant contact both with the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. I will certainly discuss the matter further with the Taoiseach when we meet over the weekend.

Mr. Hicks: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the inherent reticence and tolerance of the people of Devon and Cornwall is becoming increasingly exasperated by the inability or refusal of the Government to do anything to alleviate the growing water charges in the area? Does my right hon. Friend recall that it was 12 months ago that he personally said that he would look at this situation? When can we expect some positive news on that front?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will be aware that it is for the Director General of the Office of Water Services to determine—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members would do well to wait. It is for the Director General of Ofwat to determine the new price limits and he is in the process of doing so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has published advice on quality matters. That will assist the director general in setting new price limits. We are looking, as I have said, to see what can be done with requirements made under European Community directives to reduce the impact in the west country. We have already found and announced, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) should have known, ways in which to hold down the cost of some of the directives. Other ways are still being examined.

Q3. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Why does the Prime Minister permit water disconnections in England and Wales, but not in Scotland?

The Prime Minister: Is the hon. Gentleman asking for water disconnections in Scotland?

Q4. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Townsend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that since "Options for Change" was prepared, the world has become more turbulent and less certain? Bearing in mind the fact that the French, who have roughly similar international defence commitments, have recently agreed to up their defence budget, would my right hon. Friend be prepared to look at the planned defence cut of £1 billion in 1996?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, in cash, the French spend broadly the same as we do, although, of course, they have a conscript army in France as compared with the professional Army that we have in the United Kingdom. As I said earlier, through the "Front Line First" defence costs study, we aim to maximise the proportion of defence resources allocated to the front line. I believe that that is the right way in which to determine our defence expenditure, unlike the Opposition, who scream "cuts", but would halve defence expenditure and would, no doubt, if they had the opportunity, also scrap our nuclear capacity.

Q5. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Michie: Is the Prime Minister aware that, next week, on 30 June, a delegation of health workers and friends, supported by Sheffield Members of Parliament, will be protesting about the closure of the Royal Hallamshire hospital accident and emergency unit in Sheffield? As this is a matter of life and death, will the Prime Minister assure the House that he will not wash his

hands of that issue, but tell the quangos, which his Government have set up, to stop paying high salaries to bureaucrats and to pay for services for the people?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows of the increased resources that have gone into services for the people. I do not have to hand the details of the particular case that he has in mind, but I have no doubt that, now he has raised it, my right hon. Friend will examine it.

Mr. David Howell: Reverting to the horrific killings in Northern Ireland and bearing in mind that there has been some talk lately of a return to internment, does my right hon. Friend recognise, before considering that drastic solution, that there is an opportunity for a concerted and greatly enhanced security drive and for a strengthening of legal and intelligence resources applied against terrorism? If that is done on both sides of the border—in Dublin, and in Belfast and London—we have a chance of beating the terrorism, without which there will be no political solution.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend knows, the power of internment remains on the statute book, but would be used only in very special circumstances. Co-operation on security and intelligence matters has improved dramatically over the past few years. It is a matter of constant discussion between the British Government and the Irish Government so that we can ensure that whatever further improvements can be made will be made and precisely for the reasons set out by my right hon. Friend.

Q6. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Is the Prime Minister aware that Scottish Tories are revolting? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Led by the Scottish Office Minister responsible for industry, they are scared that percentage levels of VAT on domestic fuel will soon be higher than Tory poll ratings in Scotland. Will the Prime Minister now listen to the voices speaking in his direction? Will the message to the Prime Minister from the revolting Tories meet with any success?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that I see it as the hon. Gentleman does. As he is clearly concerned about the position in Scotland, I remind him that the figures that emerged yesterday in Scotland from Locate in Scotland, the inward investment bureau, show that Scotland attracted more inward investment in the last financial year than at any time since 1981. Ninety-five projects are planned, worth almost £600 million creating 7,700 jobs and safeguarding 3,000 others. That has happened under a Conservative Government in this country improving the quality of opportunity for people in Scotland, whatever gloss the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) may care to put on it.

Clerk of the House (Retirement)

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a brief statement to make. I have to inform the House that I have received the following letter from the Clerk of the House:

"I am writing to confirm to you my decision to retire as Clerk of the House on 31st October of this year.

While not immune from the general reluctance to leave the House of Commons voluntarily, I feel that after 41 years' service, 17 as a Clerk at the Table and seven as Clerk of the House, it is now time to move on.

During my service there has been a constant need to adjust the House's procedures and patterns of work in response to increased demands, and to constitutional change. In addition, the House has taken control of its own finances and administration, through the House of Commons Commission.

I believe that the House staff at all levels have responded well to these demands, and I should like to express my personal gratitude to them for all they have done. In particular, I wish to say how much I have appreciated the support and friendship of successive Speakers, and of Members in all parts of the House. The House of Commons is one of the most resilient and effective Parliamentary Chambers in the world. It is a great honour to have been its principal servant."

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Madam Speaker, your announcement has been heard with very real regret, as was clear from the murmurs in the House, in every part of the House as it signals the departure of someone who has given outstanding service to the House as a whole.

Many will wish to pay tribute to that service when the time of Sir Clifford's retirement comes. However, in accordance with past custom, I suggest that that would be the appropriate time for our thanks to be more fully expressed.

BILL PRESENTED

Sports (Discrimination)

Mr. David Hinchliffe, supported by Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Gary Waller, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Mr. Allan Rogers, Mr. Terry Rooney, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Dr. Norman Godman, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Alan Williams, Ms Kate Hoey and Mr. Tom Pendry, presented a Bill to make it unlawful for any rule-making body for a sport to discriminate against persons who have participated, are participating or are expected to participate in any other lawful sport, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 July, and to be printed. [Bill 129.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the six motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

Agriculture

That the draft Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Crops, Food and Feeding Stuffs) Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Northern Ireland

That the draft Betting and Lotteries (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Local Government

That the draft Local Authorities (Charges for Land Searches) Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Weights and Measures

That the draft Weights and Measures (Cosmetic Products) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Weights and Measures (Intoxicating Liquor) (Amendment) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Street Disorder and Begging Law Reform

3.33 pm

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Vagrancy Act 1824 and to create a new offence of intimidatory begging.

The Bill is aimed at a mischief which is growing—that of violence and disorder on our streets. The solution which the Bill would propose is both straightforward and urgently needed. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister identified the problem so accurately recently and defined it as aggressive begging.

There is a cancer eating away at our society—the fear of crime and the fear of becoming a victim of crime. We always assume that that relates only to burglaries, robberies and major crimes. That assumption is false; few people will actually witness a bank robbery. There is an even more destructive fear—the simple fear of disorder which arises in daily experience when people walk along a street to the shops, to school, to work or to visit friends. Increasingly, that experience is of a disorderly street, which is the source of distasteful and frightening experiences.

Our streets have changed in nature in far too many of our towns and cities, and they have become nasty places. They are no longer somewhere to dawdle and chat, enjoy the occasional sunshine, window shop and talk to neighbours. They now represent a gauntlet of fear to be run daily, especially by the more vulnerable members of our society. The right to walk safely in our streets is being taken away from our law-abiding citizens. I want to return that right to them.

Let me be clear: the problem that I am seeking to tackle is not begging but violence. Aggressive, frightening, violent and intimidatory begging would be made illegal and the police would have the power to arrest an offender immediately. I am not talking about people who are down on their luck asking for charity. My Bill would restore to them the basic human right of seeking help from others by repealing that section of the Vagrancy Act 1824.

I am talking about people who are destroying the community in the centres of our great universal and cathedral cities, our seaside and tourist resorts and our towns and cities up and down the land by terrorising decent people. Often organised in gangs, these people are not unfortunates deserving of sympathy but criminals calling out for condemnation.

The 1824 Act says:

"Every person wandering abroad, or placing himself or herself in any public place . . . to beg or gather alms . . . shall be deemed an idle and disorderly person . . . and it shall be lawful for any justice of the peace to commit such offender . . . to the house of correction."

There have been times when I have considered that "house of correction" is another expression for where I am standing now. The Act does not create an arrestable offence of itself, and it is applicable only in a random and arbitrary way. It is an unfair and ineffectual piece of legislation. Apparently, it was necessary to control the wandering bands of veterans who had returned from the Napoleonic wars. I am reasonably confident that all of them are now dead.

When the legislation was debated in 1823-24, the main concern seemed to be that it went too far in liberalising the law. I refer to a debate on 10 February 1824—which, Madam Speaker, neither you nor I will recall—in which it was said in column 112 of the Hansard Parliamentary Debate:

"The object"—

of the Bill—

"had been to mitigate the severity of the former vagrant act . . . Formerly, the magistrates had the power of sentencing to transportation for seven years; at present, they could not sentence to more than two years' imprisonment. Formerly, whipping could be inflicted by the order of one magistrate; now, it could not be inflicted, except by an order of a bench of magistrates at the quarter sessions."

That was a liberal approach indeed, even in those days. Surely we have matured as a society since those pre-Victorian days.

Begging has taken place in every society and in every age. The Opposition parties, devoid of anything else to say on the subject, attempted recently to suggest that begging was invented in 1979 and has existed only under this Conservative Government. It is only necessary to state that view clearly for it to be seen to be palpably absurd. I refer the Opposition parties to the Bible, which has many examples of the existence of beggars—long before the Conservatives took power. It is as pathetic to talk about that and take that view as it is to talk about being tough on crime and the causes of crime while voting to be soft on criminals.

More recently, the Public Order Act 1986 was brought in as a change to the Public Order Act 1936, but that does not cover the problem adequately either. Sections 4 and 5 of the 1986 Act make the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour an offence in certain circumstances, but it applies only if it can be shown that the person either intends his behaviour to be threatening, or he is aware that it may be threatening. Even then, under section 5, a policeman cannot make an arrest unless the offender repeats his conduct after a warning from the officer. In other words, if he frightens someone, he cannot be arrested unless he does it again. That is simply no longer satisfactory.

I am not concerned with the intention or the awareness of the violent offender; I am concerned about the effect that it has on the innocent passer-by who has become the victim. That is the person whose rights I stand here today to seek to protect.

The Public Order Act 1986 was not intended to deal with aggressive and violent beggars and it does not do so satisfactorily. Intimidatory begging is directed at an individual and should be considered as both a public order issue and an offence against the person. It targets a citizen and applies fear to that person. All citizens, but especially the vulnerable—the elderly, youngsters and mothers with young children—are entitled to be protected.

If I were to be given leave to introduce the Bill, it would approach the problem in two ways. First, it would create a new offence of intimidatory begging, which would be committed when someone begging in a public place behaved in such a way as to intimidate a person of reasonable firmness so that he or she felt compelled to give. Examples would include physical touching or obstructing the person solicited, following that person, using directly obscene or abusive language or violent and threatening gestures, or harassment, consisting of persisting in begging after the person solicited had declined to give, or had given a sum that the beggar did not consider adequate, as was the case in many of the examples reported to me.

[Mr. Peter Butler]

My descriptions may have sounded like simple words, but the actions are not merely frightening; they can be terrifying. Cases have been reported to me from all sorts of towns and cities throughout the land, involving all sorts of members of society. I was especially affected by the examples of such begging that were directed against the elderly. It also seems to be persistently directed at young mothers, often with toddlers or children in prams. It is not acceptable in Britain in 1994 for a mother with young children, or an elderly person, who declines to give to a beggar or gives an insufficient sum to be verbally assaulted with language that they are not accustomed to hear, or followed, only to receive a continuing harangue of foul and abusive language. We should act quickly to make it illegal and should not delay introducing a Bill to control such behaviour.

Examples have been reported to me from all parts of the country, but I need look no further than my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who was accosted by an aggressive and intimidatory beggar and pursued before she became a Member of this honourable House, when she was without the benefit of a parliamentary salary and unable to donate.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): She was a successful business woman.

Mr. Butler: She is a witness of probity, if the matter requires proof.

The Bill would criminalise violent begging, but, as I said, violence is my target, not begging. It follows that I want to repeal that part of the Vagrancy Act that criminalises what one might term traditional or polite begging, which is a basic human right. I want to criminalise violence, but decriminalise the unfortunates who find themselves in such a desperate position that they genuinely have to ask for charity. The Bill would restore some dignity to those people who are down on their luck by removing the stigma of criminality from their instinctive action in simply asking for help.

I hope that the two measures, taken together, will command the support of the House. Any hon. Member who opposes the Bill will have to explain why he or she wants to continue to make criminal the simple and time-honoured act of asking for charity, and to continue to allow violent disorder on our streets. The Bill would give our police what they do not have at present—a clear, concise and straightforward offence, with a power of arrest attached, which would enable them to remove some of the violence from our streets. Law-abiding citizens demand the protection of their right to use the streets of Britain without fear. We should meet that demand and do so now. I ask the House to give me leave to bring in this Bill.

3.42 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I agree with that part of the motion of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) that would change the law regarding begging by amending the Vagrancy Act 1824, but I do not think that he needs to introduce a new offence of intimidatory begging. All the actions that he described are covered by existing law—for example, threatening behaviour and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace. Touching people can be dealt with by using the offence of common assault.

We know what the hon. Gentleman is really talking about. Suddenly it has become the thing for Tories to pick a group of people or a very small problem, inflate it out of all proportion and use it as a smoke screen to cover their failure to deal with the many social problems afflicting this country.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East mentioned the "cancer" that was eating away at our society. I will tell him some of those cancers: mass unemployment, growing homelessness, the enormous gap between rich and poor, which is greater than it has been for 100 years, and the trade gap, which has become a gulf judging by the figures announced today. The hon. Gentleman could have mentioned all those issues, but he has come up with the problem of intimidatory begging, taking his lead from his fairly useless Prime Minister, when he launched his Euro-campaign.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): What does my hon. Friend mean, "fairly"?

Mr. Banks: I withdraw that remark, which was incorrect. I should have said that he was totally useless.

We know a bit about intimidatory begging and about money being demanded from us with menaces. That occurs usually when some overweight guy looking rather like an unmade double bed comes up and demands money with menaces. He says, "If you do not pay, you will end up either shivering in your home or you will go to gaol." We know all about that, because that is what the Chancellor of the Exchequer does every year.

That is intimidatory begging. The ordinary people of this country are told to put their hands in their pockets or purses and hand over large amounts of dosh; if not, the Government will go for them. That is intimidatory begging which is covering up the total economic incompetence of the Government and the failure of their policies. I can tell the House one thing: one might be able to walk away from a beggar, but one cannot walk away from a pot-bellied old soak called the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now going over the top, and he realises that. The quality of his arguments is being reduced by his comments, and I hope that he will now contain himself.

Mr. Banks: I have looked at early-day motion 1247 on intimidatory begging put down by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East in which he congratulates the *Daily Express* on exposing what he said was a case of somebody making a large amount of money from begging on the streets.

What has the hon. Gentleman ever done to expose the causes of begging on the streets of London or any other city? When has he ever talked about the real reason why people beg on the streets? There are thousands of people who are sleeping homeless on the streets of London at the moment.

The hon. Gentleman said that begging did not start in 1979. Madam Speaker, you see what goes on in the streets of London, and we all know. We have never seen so many beggars on the streets of London as there have been since 1979. It is one of our great growth industries, and the

causes are fairly obvious to anyone who wants to see them —mass unemployment caused by the Government's economic policies, particularly among young people.

The Prime Minister is responsible by altering social security regulations with regard to 16 and 17-year-olds. People are on the streets who have been turned out of long-stay mental institutions and who are suffering from alcoholism. It is estimated that 25 per cent. of people on the streets have been discharged from the armed services. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East said that the Vagrancy Act 1824 related to the Napoleonic wars, and that there is no one left alive from those wars—that was observant—but the fact is that 25 per cent. of people sleeping rough on the streets have been discharged from the armed services.

Homelessness is another great cause of begging and of people sleeping out on the street. Shelter estimates that 1.7 million people could be considered homeless in this country. What has happened since 1979? Homelessness has trebled in this country, and the number of people in poverty has doubled since 1979.

The Duke of Edinburgh said that there is no such thing as absolute poverty; but he is not the best person to talk about poverty and about people in need. Indeed, he might follow the example of Princess Diana who, I noticed, went the other day with her son to the Passage night shelter in Westminster on the first day of Royal Ascot. While the Tories and all of their friends were at Royal Ascot, someone at least was going out to see what was happening on the streets of London.

The Prime Minister should come out of No. 10 Downing street and walk down to the Embankment, into the Strand and into Red Lion square and see the casualties of the economic and social incompetence and the injustices of the Government. That is the sort of thing that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East should have been talking about, and not trying to raise yet another spurious argument about an object for his hatred and distaste.

It is typical of this bankrupt Government that they blame the electorate for failing the Government. They have created social and economic chaos, poverty and disruption in this country, and now they seek to blame the victims. There is no need for this proposal today. Existing laws already cover everything that the hon. Gentleman said. In those circumstances, I beg leave to oppose the motion.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 76, Noes 148.

Division No. 268] **[3.50 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Couchman, James
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dickens, Geoffrey
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lidington, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Stephen, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Sykes and
Mr. Jonathan Evans.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bradley, Keith
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.

Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 2

INCAPACITY BENEFIT: RATE

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 30, leave out from beginning to ("is") in line 32 and insert—

("(2) Subject to the following provisions of this section, the weekly rate of short-term incapacity benefit")

4.1 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3, Lords amendment No. 4, Government amendments (a) and (b) thereto, and Lords amendments Nos. 5, 6, 11 and 12.

Mr. Scott: During the passage of the Bill there has been a genuine and widespread anxiety about the level of short-term incapacity benefit for three vulnerable groups —the terminally ill, people with severe disabilities and people with children. The Government have given careful consideration to the position of all three of those groups and as a result these amendments make several important changes to the rates of incapacity benefit.

We remain convinced that 52 weeks is an appropriate qualifying period for the highest rate of benefit. We recognise that those people who proposed the disability living allowance element of Lords amendment No. 4 have been motivated by the desire to give extra help to the most severely disabled people. Incapacity benefit is an income-related benefit and not designed to meet the extra costs of disability. However, the Government have reflected on the views that have been expressed about that group and I am pleased to accept that the long-term, highest rate of incapacity benefit should be brought forward to the 29th week of incapacity for claimants receiving the highest rate care component of disability living allowance.

I am proposing two minor, technical amendments to amendment No. 4 to clarify that policy intention. The first removes redundant words and the second replaces "higher" with "highest", which is the correct legal definition of the maximum rate of DLA care component.

Following helpful discussions in the Commons Standing Committee, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State announced our intention to bring forward the long-term rate of incapacity benefit for claimants who are terminally ill to the 29th week of incapacity for work, and amendments Nos. 1 to 4 make that provision.

Anxieties have also been expressed about the position of children under the new benefit. Amendments were passed in another place which bring forward payment of child dependency increases to the 29th week of incapacity. I have reconsidered provision for children and agree that, in those limited circumstances, child dependency increases

should also be paid from the 29th week. For a family with two children, amendments Nos. 5 and 6 will mean nearly £500 extra during the first year of incapacity.

I hope that the amendments will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): We welcome the fact that the Government have accepted the Lords amendments. It is a great tribute to the all-party work that was undertaken in the other place that the amendments were successfully concluded. I pay tribute to the work undertaken in the other place. We must also reflect on the fact that the Labour party, in Committee and during the Bill's other stages, strongly pressed the issues raised in the amendments. I welcome the fact that the Government have now accepted the need to introduce and support the measures, particularly the higher rate of disability living allowance and the addition for children.

It would be remiss of me not to make some general points about the context in which the Lords amendments were accepted by the Government. I shall remind the House of the Bill's purpose. As we know, it comes into effect in April 1995 and will have two general effects on people who are sick or disabled in future. First, it will reduce the number eligible for benefit through the introduction of a more stringent test of incapacity and the abolition of access to benefit for people with industrial injuries. When people have got through the hoop of the new, stringent medical test, those entitled to the benefit will have it paid at a lower rate than the current invalidity benefit and will have to wait a full year before reaching maximum entitlement to the new benefit.

It is important to view the amendments from the other place in the context of the overall changes and level of benefit that will be paid to sick and disabled people. The Lords amendments have been introduced against a background of deteriorating living standards for disabled people, including the imposition of value added tax on fuel without adequate compensation for disabled people for the cost of that additional fuel bill, and the abolition of vehicle excise duty for disabled passengers.

To date, only one fifth of the independent living fund —the mechanism to help disabled people—has been spent. We have to view the attack on the living standards of disabled people in that context. It would be wrong of me not to flag up yet again the general attack on the rights of disabled people that took place when the Government did not accept the private Member's Bill on anti-discrimination.

The amendments are clearly to be welcomed, but they must be seen in the context of the overall lower level of benefit. There are three main provisions to reduce the level of benefit payable to claimants after April 1995. I do not want there to be any misunderstanding at a later stage, particularly on the part of Conservative Members, on exactly what effect the Bill will have on those claimants who successfully negotiate the new medical text.

The provisions will reduce the level of benefit because of the changes to the additional pension—the extra amount on top of the basic benefit payable on national insurance contributions paid between 1978 and 1990. It is payable to 85 per cent. of invalidity benefit payments and is worth, on average, £13.40 per claimant. That was stated in *Hansard* on 7 February 1994 at column *210*. It is being abolished for new claimants and frozen for people already on invalidity benefit, who are covered by transitional protection. That abolition is part of the package of cuts that the Government are making for disabled people who need the benefit to protect their living standards.

Despite the Government's arguments that the additional pension duplicates occupational pensions and other sources, official statistics show that fewer than four in 10 invalidity benefit claimants have occupational pensions, whereas more than eight in 10 receive an additional pension. Research by groups such as Disability Alliance and the Disablement Income Group shows that the people most likely to need invalidity benefit are those least likely to have access to payments from an employer or a private insurance company.

It is important to pay tribute to all the disability groups and organisations which have worked so assiduously to consider carefully all the implications of the benefit and the tremendous amount of work they have put in to ensure that hon. Members on both sides of the House and all parties are well informed about the implications of the legislation, so yet again there can be no claim of misunderstanding when the legislation becomes law in April 1995.

The second significant change to the rate of benefits covered by the group of amendments is the adult dependants' allowances. These will be restricted to non-working partners who are looking after children or are aged over 60. Few claimants now receive an allowance under these circumstances—only 170,000, or fewer than 12 per cent. of claimants. The figures are at column *804* of *Hansard* for 20 January 1994.

Those particularly affected by the loss of the addition are likely to be older claimants in their fifties whose children have left home. It has been estimated as £15 million in 1995-96 and £40 million in 1996-97—a very small sum of money.

An amendment to reintroduce the adult addition to the benefit was introduced in the other place with all-party support and lost by only three votes. Even at this late stage, I urge the Government to reconsider that element of the benefit to see whether there is any way in which the adult addition can be brought back, in the same way as the children's allowance has, to ensure that the particular group of people who require the benefit are properly protected. The Government won the vote by a very small margin in the other place and because of the closeness and the all-party nature of the support for the amendment it is essential that the Government should look at it again.

The third element that I wish to highlight is the age allowances. The age banding will be altered so that people over 45 will no longer receive any additional help. At present, an increase in benefit is payable up to age 60 for men and 55 for women. Despite amendments to pay additions for people up to age 60, provisions for age allowances in the Bill remain intact. Again, this represents a loss of £3.80 a week for the over-45s and is part of the overall package of cuts that the Government are making through these measures to the rate of entitlement for people who have successfully negotiated the medical test.

The Bill contains a fundamental redefinition of long-term incapacity from 28 weeks to 52 weeks. No explanation is given for the change, apart from the well-worn phrase that 52 weeks is a more reasonable definition. The real reason may be more that it will save the Government significant sums of money than any rational understanding or real evidence of what long-term incapacity actually means.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

As was pointed out in the other place, with the test of incapacity taking place after 28 weeks, someone will be considered incapable of all work and yet will have to wait another 24 weeks before full payment is payable. As entitlement to the highest basic rate of benefit and other increases is triggered by the start of a long-term incapacity, delaying full benefit until after a year of incapacity represents the hardest cut of all.

The targeting of people who have passed the test and are therefore considered genuine—according to the Government's definition—followed by a delay in full entitlement has been the subject of numerous amendments in both Houses, and of numerous protracted, detailed debates. An all-party amendment to reinstate long-term incapacity benefit at 28 weeks was also narrowly lost in the other place, by a mere two votes. I urge the Government to reflect again on the closeness of that result, and to consider reinstating the full rate at 28 weeks rather than delaying payment until 52 weeks have elapsed.

4.15 pm

The elements that will be delayed until after a year are the basic rate of benefit, which means a loss of £5.10 per week per claimant between weeks 29 and 52; the full rate of adult dependency increases, which means a loss of £7.60 per week per claimant with a qualifying partner for weeks 29 to 52; and age allowances, which means a loss of £12.50 per week for those under 65 and of £6.10 per week for those aged 35 to 45. Those are significant amounts. Conservative Members—who will receive a flood of letters and visitors to their surgeries, asking why cuts have been made in benefit for those who have passed the medical test—should bear in mind the fact that the Opposition have made the consequences of the legislation absolutely clear: they cannot give the excuse that they did not know or understand its implications.

We welcome the three amendments dealing with disability living allowance, the terminally ill and children's additions. Two amendments have not been selected and I therefore do not intend to speak about them; but we could have had an interesting debate on entitling not only the terminally ill and those on the higher rate of DLA, but those who have been diagnosed to be suffering from a prescribed disease or disability, to benefit at 28 weeks—a system of "fast-tracking".

I am sorry that we have not been able to debate the Lords amendment that would complete the task of awarding benefit at 28 weeks rather than 52 to groups which will be exempt from the functional element of the new incapacity test. We wanted to bring them into line; although that clearly will not be possible, I urge the Minister to consider that last element again.

The terminally ill are, as it were, on the outside lane of a three-lane motorway, moving towards the 28 weeks on the fast track. The Government have now accepted the higher care component for DLA in the centre lane, but the inside lane should also keep pace with the traffic flow: that is, those with prescribed diseases should be included on the fast track. They are not only on the same motorway, but are travelling only for what could be described as the extra 24 "miles".

I believe that the cost of fast-tracking those people to 28 weeks so that they need not wait for 52 would be extremely small and that it would be far neater for the legislation to bring all three components together on the fast track rather than retaining the anomaly of a group being left outside it, which is likely to lead to much confusion, concern and anger among those who have been exempted from the functional test but are not being allowed the full rate of benefit until 52 weeks have passed. I urge the Minister, therefore, to consider the amendments on those matters, although I accept that we shall not debate or vote on them today.

The Government accept the Lords amendments, which result from the excellent work that was undertaken in the other place, but I urge the Minister to consider not only the overall impact that the Bill will have on disabled people but the smaller issues that I identified to see whether, when the regulations are introduced, we can make a little more progress. I know that he is constrained by the pressures that the Treasury has placed on the Department of Social Security, but that is not a good enough reason for not protecting disabled people and ensuring that their income does not suffer as a result of the Bill.

We welcome the changes and we commend the work that the other place undertook in support of the changes.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I am glad that the Government intend to accept the purposes of the amendments passed in another place with all-party support. They will help the most severely disabled people and households of the sick and disabled where there are children. The Government's response has been decent and in keeping with the moral concern and seriousness with which Ministers consistently approach their responsibility in social policy.

Some people criticise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for confronting us with the realities of what is happening in our society and with the choices that we have to make, but that is his duty. He performs it courageously, and he is right to insist that we think carefully about the implications of where our instincts and impulses lead us. He has tempered rigour here, however, with flexible common sense, which is characteristic and welcome.

An amendment was debated in the House of Lords that would have provided that benefit should be payable after 28 weeks instead of a year to adult dependants, notably spouses as well as children. In circumstances of invalidity, spouses and partners are carers, and we should do more to support them, but the Government were unable to accept that amendment.

Another more ambitious, more costly but justified amendment would have provided that incapacity benefit would be paid at the long-term rate to all claimants who passed the new medical test after 28 weeks instead of after a year. That too was found unacceptable. I cannot understand the case for requiring claimants to undergo a stringent medical test at six months and then to wait 12 months for incapacity benefit. If need is demonstrated, it should be met. The only argument for making them wait—often, I fear, in indigence—is one of economy, but this is the wrong area in which to make economies.

It is good that the Government accept these amendments and provide fast tracking for the terminally ill, and for those on the higher rate component of disability living allowance—the most severely disabled people—to go on to the long-term rate of incapacity benefit after 28 weeks. Happily, they will not be required to undergo the new medical test.

The new medical test of incapacity is central to the Bill and to a number of the amendments. Debate in both Houses has not resulted in much meeting of minds or in any apparent accommodation by the Government of the powerful criticisms that have been made.

The very concept of an objective medical test of incapacity is unsustainable. I said that on Second Reading, and I have not changed my view. The capacity of a person for work is not susceptible to the kind of objective assessment that the Government hope will be made. We are talking about the interaction of the infinite variety of people with the infinite variety of their circumstances. An individual's medical, intellectual, educational, familial, social and economic circumstances will all have an important bearing on his or her capacity to do a particular job. Generally, one cannot say that someone is either absolutely capable, or absolutely incapable, of work.

I understand why the Government want objectivity, and why they want to get away from subjectivity and discretion. They wanted to do so with child support, as well as with invalidity benefit. Not only Treasury Ministers but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, who always seeks to be far-sighted and responsible in that field—he controls the largest budget in Whitehall, so that is just as well—fear, with some justification, that discretion will lead to loss of control over expenditure. However, economic discipline should serve our social objectives, not the other way around.

The objectivity that the Government seek in this context is a chimera, whose pursuit distances us from the responsibility that we should not evade, and in the end cannot evade, to make judgments about personal and social needs in the variety of their manifestations, and to decide collectively how to respond to them.

Among the needs to which we should address ourselves are those of men in middle age who can no longer find opportunities in the labour market. As I explained on Second Reading, invalidity benefit has played a crucial part in dealing with those needs. The amendment to allow benefit to be paid earlier for such men's children will be helpful to a number of them.

Dr. Jonathan Wadsworth of the London School of Economics has studied what is happening to those people. The number of men between 35 and 65 years old newly categorised as economically inactive—that is defined as not looking, and not available, for work—grew by 110,000 between the winter of 1992 and the winter of 1993, while unemployment overall was falling. Many of those unemployed men have children, and Lords amendments Nos. 5 and 6 are of great relevance to that category.

We should be even more especially concerned for the sub-set within that category, consisting of men in the age group 55 to 64—although, in concentrating on men, I do not mean to decry the needs of women.

In that cohort of men, unemployment rose by 23 per cent. between 1986 and 1993, while inactivity rose by 20 per cent. Meanwhile, a greater number of new claimants of invalidity benefit were unemployed, and claimants were staying on invalidity benefit for longer, often much longer. There are strong correlations between areas of high unemployment and areas of long-term sickness, and also between relatively low levels of skills and long-term sickness. Invalidity benefit has been providing succour for many long-term unemployed people, and for many who have come to despair of the possibility of being employed.

Some of my hon. Friends say that there must be abuse, and that we cannot possibly afford that racket, so the Government are right drastically to reduce eligibility for the new incapacity benefit. To them, and to my right hon. Friends, I say two things. First, as I said on Second Reading, the DSS's own research, as well as other analyses available, have failed to demonstrate significant abuse.

Secondly, there remains a problem that demands a constructive response from us. There is a significant and rising number of unemployed people who have no good prospects in the labour market, who had low earnings when they were in work, and who have few savings and exiguous pension prospects. I submit that those people have a legitimate claim on us. They are the casualties of an economic restructuring which could not have been avoided, and which the Government have strongly endorsed and promoted.

With amendments Nos. 5 and 6, the Government have helped those people in relation to their children, but beyond that the Government's response to their needs so far, as I understand it, is to say that, in future, it will be much harder for them to qualify for incapacity benefit, and that, furthermore, they will have to seek work with extra intensity in a labour market that is bitterly inhospitable to them, or they will not be eligible for the job seeker's allowance. Whatever the merits of incapacity benefit and the job seeker's allowance, they will not be a sufficient response on the part of society to this clearly identifiable social need. I suggest that there is food for thought for all the parties here.

I have detained the House longer than may be customary or convenient on Lords amendments, particularly when the Government are showing some generosity in their response to them. I offer the excuse that, in this House and among the wider public, debate on this massively important measure, through which the Government expect to save £1.5 billion a year, has been perfunctory. We should be grateful to the other place, where there were admirable debates. Not for the first time, the peers showed themselves to be closer to the people than the Commons was.

4.30 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred to the Government's generosity. I hope that I receive a generous response to a number of my concerns about the Bill. I remind the Minister that, in the excellent notes provided by his Department, page 2 of the explanatory memorandum on the Lords amendments mentions claimants who are over pension age. I seek assurances from the Minister. He may not be able to give them to me now, but I hope that, by way of a signal, non-verbal or otherwise, he will promise to write to me. My questions relate directly to the Lords amendments.

I am concerned about women aged 60 to 65 who have had their invalidity benefit suspended until the European Court of Justice offers an opinion on the referral made by the Department and by counsel representing Mrs. Rose Graham at the English Court of Appeal. That referral was made four or five months ago. Given the backlog of work that the 13 judges in Luxembourg face, a decision may not be reached for another 18 months, yet the measure will come into effect next year.

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

Can the Minister assure me that the thousands of women who are directly affected by the Graham case—I refer here to the decision made by Commissioner Skinner three years ago, involving Mrs. Graham of Birkenhead—will not have to face further hurdles even though a decision will not be made by the European Court of Justice for at least 18 months?

There are several hundred such women in my constituency alone, and in Northern Ireland more than 3,000 such women have made applications for the benefit to be paid to them. I reckon that about 80,000 women must be trapped by the lengthy process gone through by the European Court of Justice in reaching an opinion on such referrals. I do not criticise the court too harshly; it has an enormous work load. I visited the court last year and spoke to some of the judges. I am fairly confident that I am correct when I say that an opinion will not be offered on Mrs. Graham's case in particular and on the 80,000 women generally for at least another 18 months.

I seek an assurance from the Minister. I sincerely hope that the women will not have to undergo a new medical test. It is not their fault that they are suffering in this way. Commissioner Skinner decreed that the Government were contravening a European directive passed as long ago as 1979—or was it 1977? I do not have notes to hand. Those women should be paid that benefit until the Supreme Court makes its decision. I say that it is its opinion, but, in every sense of the word, it will make a judgment on Commissioner Skinner's decision, and the referral by the Department of Social Security and Mrs. Graham's counsel. I seek an assurance that there will be no new medical test.

In the interim period—it is not an interim period for the women concerned, many of whom are suffering hardship—I would also like to know about the guidelines issued to local Benefits Agency offices in respect of appeals made on the basis of hardship. If the Minister cannot answer me now, would he write to me?

Lord Henley told me in a letter some 18 months ago that a woman caught up in those circumstances may appeal to have her invalidity benefit restored on the basis of the hardship that she is suffering. I know from a written answer that some 770 women have been paid on the basis of hardship, but some offices—perhaps one of them is the office in Greenock—have an over-harsh list of criteria defining hardship.

Will the Minister and his officials look again at what those criteria mean? What is their definition of hardship? We are talking about 80,000 women who, through no fault of their own, are being made to suffer because the Government are challenging that Commissioner's decision all the way to Luxembourg. The Government are at fault in not paying invalidity benefit to women aged 60 to 65. Let us not forget that it is a contributory benefit, not a non-contributory benefit.

In returning to the idea of generosity, the Government should be paying those women invalidity benefit until the day that the European Court of Justice offers the English Court of Appeal its opinion. I am fairly confident that those 13 judges—by then, there may be 14, 15 or 16 judges in that Supreme European Court—will say that Commissioner Skinner was right and that the Government were wrong.

I am therefore seeking assurances about those women, but, above all, the Minister should show some generosity of spirit by ensuring that they are paid. If not, I ask him to reconsider the criteria that his officials in the Benefits Agency local offices use to define hardship. Those criteria are over-harsh, and they penalise women on very low incomes.

Mr. Scott: It would be best if I wrote to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) to cover the various points that he has set out. He will understand that I am especially sensitive to any danger of misleading the House in response to an intervention. However, I can tell him at the moment—I may want to embellish the explanation in the letter to him—that the case of a person whose benefit has been suspended pending the Graham case and who makes representation to the Secretary of State in cases of hardship will be considered sympathetically.

A number of the women concerned have had the reinstatement of their benefit in those circumstances. Bearing in mind that the points raised by the hon. Gentleman are strictly outside the scope of our discussions, it would be better if I sent him a considered response on those matters.

The fact that a number of the hon. Gentleman's points are outside the scope of the Lords amendments may be characteristic of other speeches—if I may say so without in any way criticising your control of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a result of my response to discussions in another place and to representations which were made during the Commons consideration earlier, I hope that it has been possible for those who have spoken to welcome the changes which flow from the amendments. I recognise that there will always be pressure for the Government to go further and faster than they feel possible.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) referred to additional pensions. It is worth reminding the hon. Gentleman that, if we had not tackled the issue of additional pensions in the Bill, by the end of the century we would be talking about a cost to the taxpayer of additional pensions of £2 billion a year. Even the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said that he thought that the existence of additional pensions in today's social security system was, to use his phrase, a bit of an anomaly. I certainly share that view.

Points were also made about the adult dependency increase. It is worth making it clear that the adult dependency increase is not being abolished. It is being focused on those groups which are unlikely to be economically active and are therefore in the greatest need. It is not right that ADIs, which were introduced in 1948, should remain for ever untouched by the social changes that have occurred in the intervening period. I believe that our judgment about that matter is correct.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred to exemption from medical tests. That subject stretches the boundaries of our discussion on Lords amendment No. 1. However, the medical test is designed for one purpose, and that is to decide whether people can be passported on to the benefit. While people who have experienced certain conditions can be exempted from the medical test, it is a completely different proposition to say that if someone has a particular medical condition, the severity of that condition should be regarded as a passport to incapacity benefit.

Passporting makes sense where a condition is specific and easily recognised. However, it is not a measure, in any sense of the word, of the severity of a condition. In using the higher rate of DLA as the passport to the benefit, we are seeking to limit and to focus that particular arrangement on the most severely handicapped.

I hope that, with that brief response to the points that have been raised, I can welcome the guarded and somewhat limited welcome which has been given to this group of amendments. I certainly believe that they will be welcomed outside the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 3, line 5, at end insert—

("(3A) In the case of a person who has been entitled to short-term incapacity benefit for 196 days or more in any period of incapacity for work and is terminally ill, or, if he is in receipt of the higher rate of the care component of disability living allowance, the weekly rate of short-term incapacity benefit payable, if greater than the rate otherwise payable to him under subsection (2) or (3) above, shall be equal to the rate at which long-term incapacity benefit under section 30A above would be payable to him if he were entitled to it.

For the purposes of this subsection a person is terminally ill if he suffers from a progressive disease and his death in consequence of that disease can reasonably be expected within 6 months.

(3B) References to short-term incapacity benefit at the higher rate shall be construed as including short-term incapacity benefit payable to any person who has been entitled to that benefit for 196 days or more in a period of incapacity for work, notwithstanding that the rate of benefit is determined in accordance with subsection (3) or (3A) above.")

Amendments made to the Lords amendment: (a), in line 4, after "and" insert "—(a)"

(b), in line 4, leave out from "or" to "rate" and insert "(b) he is entitled to the highest"—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Lords amendment No. 4, as amended, agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 3

INCAPACITY BENEFIT: SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS.

Lords amendment: No. 7, in page 5, line 9, leave out ("in such cases as may be prescribed,")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this it will be convenient to take Lords Amendments Nos. 8, 10, 18, 24, 25, 27, 30, 32, 44 to 46, 66 to 71 and 77 to 80.

Mr. Scott: These are all technical amendments and it would be for the convenience of the House if I moved them formally.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We now come to Lords amendment No. 7. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, it should be Lords amendment No. 9. I call the Minister.

Mr. Scott: I understand your problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am sure do other hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I agree that there are too many papers. Before the Minister speaks to the amendment, I must say that I have been rather tolerant this afternoon. The debate on the first group of amendments went rather wide. My period of tolerance has now ended and hon. Members should address the amendments before the House.

4.45 pm

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 6, line 14, at end insert

("or training of such other description as may be prescribed")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 40, 41 and 65.

Mr. Scott: I am sure that hon. Members, and certainly those who took part in the Committee stage, will recall our discussions in our earlier proceedings. Concern was expressed about the scope of the long training linking rule introduced as part of the incapacity benefit structure. I said then that that was an issue at which I was prepared to look again with sympathy. I undertook to respond, before the end of the Bill's passage, on the outcome of our deliberations. These four amendments were tabled in another place to give effect to our proposals.

As hon. Members may already be aware, the training linking rule is intended to provide an incentive for people receiving incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance to try to make a return to work. It provides a safeguard in that if their attempt fails because of their incapacity, they can return to the same benefit that they were previously receiving within two years. Additionally, it protects the position of those people who are assessed as capable of work and who begin, or are already undertaking, a training course. If their condition deteriorates again within the two-year period—as it may in some cases—those people could also return to their previous benefit.

I hope that hon. Members will understand that, for people undertaking a training course where a training allowance is not payable, incapacity benefit will remain in payment so long as they continue to satisfy the test of incapacity for work. If at any stage during a person's course of training that person is assessed as no longer satisfying the test of incapacity, as one would reasonably expect, that benefit would cease. Those rules will, as now, apply equally to SDA.

Hon. Members will understand that anyone undertaking a non-Department of Employment course who continues to be incapable of work will have no need of the linking rule. That person's benefit will continue in payment. However, the amendments that I am commending to the House today will benefit people who are undertaking a course of training and fail a test of incapacity and those who begin a training course on leaving benefit.

The amendments expand the use of the term "training for work" as used in the Bill to include

"training of such other description as may be prescribed".

That will apply to the long linking rule on both incapacity benefit and SDA.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 65 relate to incapacity benefit and amendment No. 40 relates to severe disablement allowance. That broader definition of "training for work" will also apply to the new qualifying benefit rule on DWA. That allows a person to undertake a period of training between leaving a qualifying benefit, whether that be incapacity benefit or SDA, and making a claim for DWA. Amendment No. 41 gives effect to that change.

[Mr. Scott]

We feel that it is essential to use regulations for that provision. I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that training provision has changed dramatically over the past 20 years and will no doubt continue to change in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is important that legislation in this important area is sufficiently flexible to allow us to keep it up to date when any new relevant initiatives arise.

We have not as yet finalised the drafting of regulations to be made under those powers, but I can tell the House what we intend them to cover. Regulations will specify both additional Department of Employment programmes and the types of non-Government training courses that should be covered. We expect, for example, employment rehabilitation and community action programmes—both run by the Department—to be included. With non-Government training, we intend to include full-time courses, the sole or main purpose of which is the acquisition of occupational or vocational skills. Full-time is defined as "16 hours or more".

As I am sure the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) will recall, the issue of funding such schemes through the European social fund was raised in Committee. I can assure the House that as long as the sole or main purpose of the course funded by the European social fund is the acquisition of occupational or vocational skills, such courses will be covered by the broader definition. I hope that these changes will be welcomed in the House and outside it.

Mr. Bradley: Clearly, we welcome the Minister's announcement and the amendments that have been tabled. He has looked carefully at the arguments that were put forward in Committee. Our deliberations have borne some fruit today, and we welcome that.

I simply seek clarification not specifically on training but on a related topic, namely, therapeutic earnings. Following our discussions in Committee, a concession was made, and I welcome the correspondence from the Under-Secretary of State.

The way in which the Government have considered the matter is to bring forward the definition of "therapeutic work" as work that is undertaken under medical supervision in a hospital or similar institution. I seek clarification from the Minister as to whether that is as narrowly defined as it would appear to be because, if it is, it clearly seems to fly in the face of the Government's policy on community care.

I should like the Minister to tell the House whether the therapeutic rules will cover people who are living in the community but who are, for example, out-patients of a hospital or other institution, and whether similar rules will cover people who live in the community and attend adult training centres or other similar centres run by local authorities, the voluntary sector or health service authorities. Clearly, that is linked to the views on training. It seemed to us that, although there had been a concession on therapeutic work, it has been extremely narrowly defined.

Will the Minister examine the definition in the broader context of community care with a view to extending the scope for an individual to receive therapeutic earnings? Clearly, we welcome the amendment, and I would welcome any further comments that the Minister may have on that point.

Mr. Scott: I think that the hon. Gentleman recognises my anxiety in this whole area, to enable a smooth transition from, as it were, incapacity through into work. Therefore, the whole issue of therapeutic work is something in which I take a continued and constructive interest.

In practice, there are two types of therapeutic work. There is therapeutic work within some sort of institution and under medical supervision. It is also possible for a person living in the community to have the same advantage as someone in an institution, as long as the work is recommended by their doctor as being therapeutic in its effect. I hope that that covers the main point raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 13, in page 6, line 32, at end insert—

("(4) There shall be excluded any days in respect of which a person was disqualified for receiving incapacity benefit.")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 16, 17, 26, 28, 29, 31, 73 and 81.

Mr. Scott: The amendments in this group are of a technical nature and deal with the action to be taken where a person falls into one of three categories, namely, he has become incapable of work through misconduct, he fails without good cause to attend or submit himself to such medical or other treatment as required or, thirdly, he fail without good cause to observe any prescribed rules of behaviour.

In any of those circumstances, a financial penalty will be imposed by stopping the payment of benefit for a period of up to six weeks. At the end of that period, benefit should be reinstated without requiring a further claim to benefit. I hope that these amendments will be acceptable to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4

POWER TO PROVIDE FOR THE TRANSITION TO INCAPACITY BENEFIT.

Lords amendment: No. 14, in page 9, line 7, at end insert—

("( ) Regulations under this section may provide, in relation to transitional cases where the rate of incapacity benefit falls to be calculated by reference to the rate of dependency allowance paid or payable before commencement, that any old saving provisions shall have effect subject to the regulations or shall cease to have effect in accordance with the regulations.

For the purposes of this subsection—

"dependency allowance" means an allowance of the kind provided for in Part IV of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, and

"old saving provisions" means provisions of any description, including administrative provisions, in connection with a previous change affecting entitlement to or the amount of dependency allowances, preserving a person's position in any respect.")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment will enable regulations to be made which will make it possible to rationalise the existing forms of transitional protection for dependency increases of invalidity benefit from April 1995. The intention is to align the old provisions with new forms of protection, which we intend to create when incapacity benefit is introduced. The House will be reassured to learn that acceptance of the amendment will not lead to cash losses for those whose circumstances remain unchanged.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the structure of dependency increases changed in a number of ways. I do not think that the House would want me to give a detailed account of those changes. A notable by-product of the process has been the creation of six separate forms of transitional protection. The number of affected beneficiaries is very small, and these forms of protection do not operate on a uniform basis. We believe that it is right to use the opportunity presented by the introduction of the new benefit to place them all on the same footing.

I explained that the relevant provisions do not operate in the same way. Some are linked to ongoing entitlement, and others are linked to the continuation of payment. Without going into any further details, I hope that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and the House will accept that these are reasonable proposals which will make a worthwhile reduction in complexity at the inception of incapacity benefit. I hope that the amendments will be acceptable to the House.

Mr. Bradley: I certainly do not want the Minister to go into the details of all the possible transitional arrangements which may be forthcoming. I wonder whether he could simply clarify a comment that was made in another place. I quote:

"The new rules will mean more favourable treatment for some beneficiaries and less advantageous treatment of others when compared with the current arrangements."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 May 1994; Vol. 554, c. 1466.]

Is the Minister able to give specific examples of where it will be "less advantageous" than the current arrangements under the new rules for transitional payments?

Mr. Scott: I shall give an illustration. There is a form of existing transitional protection dating from 1985 relating to the introduction of the current earnings rule for adult dependency increases of invalidity benefit. Under that rule, payment ceases when earnings exceed a prescribed limit. However, the old rule provides for tapered withdrawal of the increase, so when the dependency increase is uprated each year the amount of earnings necessary to extinguish it also rises. That produces a rather bizarre effect.

Rather than merely preserving the position of beneficiaries affected by the change in 1985, this form of protection has increased in generosity over time, and would continue to do so at future upratings. Our intention is to place an overriding limit on that form of protection equal to the point at which protection currently ceases. If earnings exceed the limit for more than eight weeks, protection will come to an end. That would allow the existing advantage conferred by that form of protection to be retained, but would not allow subsequent increases in future years. That is one example that I can give the hon. Gentleman of the sort of complexities that have developed. We think that reining back may be necessary in some areas.

Mr. Bradley: Unfortunately, I have not worked up a similar example to compare with the Minister's, but his example is now crystal clear.

Clearly, the arrangements are complicated and we will have to consider them in detail, case by case, as they come up. While in no way opposing the amendments, we notify the House of our intention to return to the matter, probably through regulation, when the real effects of the legislation are apparent after April 1995. We will consider the matter at a later date.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 15, in page 9, line 12, leave out ("three") and insert ("four")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 33 to 39 and 76.

5 pm

Mr. Scott: The amendments arise as a consequence of the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Scrutiny of Delegated Powers. While that Committee was broadly content with the approach taken in the Bill, it drew attention to two matters. The first was the period during which regulations made under clauses 4, 5, 6 and 7 will be subject to the affirmative procedure. Members of the House, as well as members of that Committee, rightly pay close attention to whether powers are subject to the affirmative or negative procedures when they consider Bills that contain powers to make secondary legislation.

As the House will understand, twin pressures must be balanced. On the one hand, we must ensure that the business of the House is not cluttered up with regulations that are of minor import, and, on the other, that major measures are properly scrutinised on the Floor of the House. The Bill attempts to marry those concerns by time limiting the period to which regulations will be subject to the affirmative procedure.

The first few sets of regulations made under the provisions are likely to attract a high level of interest and scrutiny, as is proper. Future regulations, however, are likely to be in less controversial areas of legislation.

The Standing Committee welcomed time limiting the application of the affirmative procedure, which was a novel method, but one that responded to concerns expressed when we discussed the matters there. The Government had felt that three years from Royal Assent would be a suitable time for such regulations to be subject to the affirmative procedure. The Committee suggested commencement rather than Royal Assent, in cases where regulations were not made immediately. Regulations will, however, be made before the full commencement of the Act.

In all probability, a commencement order will commence clauses 4 and 7 of the Act in full, but clauses 5 and 6 only to the extent that regulations can be made. A later commencement order will fully commence clauses 5 and 6, along with the rest of the Act.

As clauses 4 5 and 6 will not be commenced until April 1995, any regulations made under powers contained in those clauses would, if subject to the affirmative procedure only after commencement, automatically revert to the negative procedure. That was not the Committee's or the Government's intention, but we are sympathetic to the

[Mr. Scott]

Committee's concerns. We introduced amendments to extend the period in which amendments are subject to the affirmative procedure from three to four years.

Most social security regulations are subject to the scrutiny of the Social Security Advisory Committee. The two main exceptions are regulations made within six months of the Act and regulations that concern rates of benefit. We had originally thought that regulations made under the appropriate section would only set out the rates of age additions. Accordingly, those would not fall to be scrutinised by the SSAC and paragraph 52 was included in schedule 1 of the Bill.

The regulations will be broader than just the rates of benefit. It is appropriate, therefore, that the SSAC should consider those regulations. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Bradley: We, of course, welcome the fact that the amendments have been tabled. My memory of the Standing Committee is not that we were all leaping up and down, full of exhaltation and pleasure because of the time limit on the affirmative procedure. We were expressing pleasure because we had the affirmative procedure and because it would last for a longer period than had originally been intended, rather than at the novelty of time limiting, as the Minister put it.

We also welcome the fact that the regulations will be scrutinised by the Social Security Advisory Committee. I assure the Minister that the Opposition will pay great attention, at every stage, to all the regulations that are introduced. As we have said on many occasions, we do not intend generally to accept that legislation should be by regulation, rather than primary legislation. The Bill is a classic case of more and more of the detail of legislation being pushed towards regulation and so we intend to scrutinise that at every turn, and by every means possible, to ensure proper parliamentary scrutiny of this crucial legislation for disabled people. However, we welcome the amendments.

Clause 5

Test of Incapacity for Work

Lords amendments Nos. 16 to 18 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 19, in page 10, line 41, leave out ("12") and insert ("21")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 20 to 23.

Mr. Scott: These amendments extend the own-occupation test to make it more reasonable and to clarify its application.

The Bill introduces two tests of incapacity. The own-occupation test will apply to most people at the onset of their period of sickness and will be applied for the first 28 weeks of incapacity. In essence, it is a test of whether people can do their own job and it mirrors the present system.

We will have to decide who can qualify for the own-occupation test. When the Bill was considered in Standing Committee we proposed that if someone had worked for more than eight weeks in the past 12 they should undergo the own-occupation test. If someone did not fulfil that requirement, they should undergo the all-work test at the beginning of their incapacity—the latter is the new, functional medical test, with which those hon. Members who have taken part in our discussions will be familiar.

In Committee, the argument was advanced that the qualifying period for the own-occupation test was unreasonable and I undertook to consider the matter further. On reflection, we came to the conclusion that the qualification was less than totally reasonable. It would have meant that someone who had been in work for 20 years and was made redundant would face the all-work test immediately if he or she fell sick after only five weeks of redundancy.

In deciding the qualification for the own-occupation test, our aim was to produce a simple, workable definition that would ensure that as many people as possible underwent the own-occupation test when they became sick. Only in exceptional circumstances did we expect anyone to have to undergo the all-work test at that stage.

The amendment means that someone who has undertaken an occupation for more than eight weeks in the past 21 weeks will face the own-occupation test at the onset of incapacity, which is a much more reasonable approach.

Amendment No. 20 is purely technical and serves to clarify the drafting of section 171B(4). It applies either to disability working allowance or the training long-linking rule, as it applies to a person, where we do not want the long-linking rule to affect the test of incapacity that is applied. Section 171B(4) as it stands could be interpreted to have the effect that, where a person had been working and receiving DWA and made a further claim to benefit, he would be subject to the all-work test even though he had clearly been working for more than eight weeks prior to the claim. That is not what we want and amendment No. 20 puts the issue beyond all doubt, ensuring that the own-occupation test is applied where appropriate. That will be the second beneficial move.

Amendments Nos. 21 and 22 are also designed to clarify the application of the own-occupation test. As I explained before, in the majority of cases, for the first 28 weeks, a person's incapacity will be measured against his own occupation. We want as many people as possible to undergo the own-occupation test at the start of their period of sickness. We always intended that people on training courses—whether paid or unpaid—and who would return to their previous job or employer would be covered by the provision.

Amendment No. 22 is designed to ensure that we have such powers, and amendment No. 21 is a small technical amendment required for the paragraph proposed by amendment No. 22 to be inserted. Amendment No. 23 ensures that we have the necessary powers to ensure that the provision to apply to people who had more than one job during the 21-week period, or who had more than one job at the same time, are also included within this provision.

I understand the concerns which hon. Members have about the own-occupation test and the all-work test, but I hope that they will at least agree that the amendments are important improvements to the own-occupation test.

Mr. Bradley: We have now come to the amendments where I thought that we would be having the debate on the

medical test. But as we had a mini-debate on that—with your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I do not intend to range over all the issues of concern which were raised by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), which I fully support. However, it seems yet again that this matter has become a great yawning gap in the legislation.

It is the most difficult area for us to debate effectively, even at this late stage in the passing of the legislation, because as yet we have no details of what the medical test will be. We do not know whether it will apply to the own-occupation or to the all-work test, or whether it refers to work at all. As we know, yet again there is no definition of work in the Bill, let alone the other definitions about which we previously expressed concern as they were not on the face of the Bill.

I shall not range over all the concerns about the medical test to which we will clearly return when the medical test is published and goes out for further consultation. I would just seek some clarification about where work on the medical test itself has got to. I am aware that the so-called panel of experts has had meetings. Has that panel now completed its deliberations, or is it having further meetings to consider and refine further this document for which we are awaiting?

Will the revised medical test which is to go out for consultation still be published in August of this year? If and when it is published, how will consultation on the revised document be undertaken? What organisations and individuals will be consulted on that test?

5.15 pm

Crucially, can the Minister give me some guidance on how the Government intend to respond to the clear divergence of opinion within the so-called panel of experts about the way in which the test is being put together? The Minister is well aware of a letter which was sent to the noble Lord Astor from a number of organisations which are involved in the new medical test. They have sought clarification on one point upon which the Minister may want to comment.

The letter, dated 6 May 1994, states:

"It really will not be acceptable if panellists' concerns about various aspects of the test are not acknowledged in the final report of the consultation and departmental evaluation of the new test".

Will their differing views about how the test can operate in practice be presented in the final report? The letter continues:

"We seek your assurance that there will be an opportunity to address our concerns, for example in a special section of the report."

If the deliberations have moved on to a point where the revised medical test is about to be finalised—it is clear that there are a lot of differences of opinion about how the functional test will apply in practice—will those panellists be afforded the opportunity before the report is published to express their views further?

Will those differences of opinion be expressed in the report or do the Government intend to try to impose their consensual view upon the panel of experts to come out with a report which they believe reflects all the issues that the 80 panellists are expressing? These are very important matters on which we must judge the medical test within the legislation.

I hope that the Minister can give the House some assurances about the progress and presentation of that test and how it will be then further debated, and the issues of concern brought back to the Floor of the House through regulation for our further consideration.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) acknowledged that the work has been proceeding. The results of the work—that is to say, the consultation process, the assessment panels and the evaluation study phases have already been completed—are now being analysed, and the detail of the tests will be revised to take account of the outcome of the consultation, development and evaluation processes.

Our next step is still to publish the results with our final proposals in a report in August. Only after all that will we present our final proposals on the test to Parliament for approval in the form of regulations. The earlier publication of our final proposals should allow interested parties to make their views known before the regulations are laid, and should ensure that we develop a test that is fair. The panel's task has been to advise on the details of the test, although of course not on the basis of the policy. Nobody was asked in any sense to sign up to the basis of the policy when they agreed to take part in the panel's work.

I must say that it has been an almost unique and very useful exercise to have the panel involved in the important work. I should emphasise, perhaps particularly at this point, that no decision has yet been made about the setting of thresholds which will determine whether or not a person is found capable or incapable of work. Nor will any decisions be made until the development and evaluation work is complete.

Once we have published our findings, regulations will be laid, and it will then obviously be up to any organisation to come forward with their comments on those proposals. We will obviously take account of those as the final shape of the test is decided.

Dr. Godman: Does the eight-week period incorporate training for a person's work? For example, welders work intermittently in the offshore fabrication industry, and if they are out of work for three or four weeks, they may not be able to reach the standards set for such work in that industry. They have been out of work to undergo periods of training to bring them back to the levels required by Norsk Veritas and an American insurance regulatory body. Does that eight-week period incorporate or include periods of training?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman's intervention relates to a previous amendment, but that period certainly would include any period of training. I was talking specifically about the medical test and the arrangements being made for our proposals to be brought forward properly and publicly discussed. There will then be a final opportunity for the House to discuss the regulations which will flow from that. If I can leap backwards, the answer to the hon. Gentleman is that such a period will certainly apply.

Mr. Bradley: I glean from the Minister's response that he intends to issue the final report, and that those panellists who have a dissenting view on it, rather than having their views highlighted in the report, will be allowed to comment on it. If I have misunderstood, I would welcome a correction from the Minister. It is important to discover whether the document will be published as though there was consensus. Will those panellists who disagree have an

[Mr. Bradley]

opportunity to express their opinions separately, or will their concerns be highlighted when the revised report is published?

Mr. Scott: It is my present intention that, once the Government have considered the work of the panellists and the evaluation process, they will come forward with their own proposals. It will then be open to anyone to make clear his views about them. Whatever people's final views, I am extremely grateful to those who have taken part in the work of the panel for the body of expertise that they have offered and the fact that they have concentrated on an important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to, some with Special Entry.

Schedule 1

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 42, in page 19, line 24, at end insert

("under section 30A below or short-term or long-term incapacity benefit under section 40 or 41 below")

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 43, 47 to 64, 72, 74 and 75.

Mr. Bradley: The effect of the amendment, as laid out in the Department's document, is welcome. Widows and widowers who are incapable of work will qualify for incapacity benefit on the basis of their deceased spouses' national insurance contributions. Why are industrial injuries excluded from a similar provision?

Mr. Scott: I am not sure that I can give an answer off the cuff, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman to let him know.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Sunday Trading Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 4 agreed to.

Schedule 1

RESTRICTIONS ON SUNDAY OPENING OF LARGE SHOPS

Lords amendment: No. 5, in page 4, leave out line 9

5.24 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 6 to 8, 10, 11 and 13.

Mr. Lloyd: During the many changes that the Bill has undergone, any reference to "licensed premises", other than in the list of definitions, has been removed from schedule 1. The definition is therefore redundant, and amendment No. 5 seeks to delete it. I hope that it will assist the House if I also say a word about the other amendments in the group.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 11 would provide an exemption for any stand used in an exhibition from the six-hour restriction that the Bill places on trading by large shops. According to the current law, stands at most exhibitions are able to trade legally on a Sunday, notwithstanding the provisions of the Shops Act 1950, because of a series of provisions in various local Acts, which allow trading at specific and listed sites. For example, the West Midlands County Council Act 1980 disapplies the closing and Sunday trading provisions of the 1950 Act to any shop or stand open during the course of an exhibition at the National Exhibition Centre.

This is, of course, a matter for the House, but, as I see it, the amendments do not provide a loophole for large retailers to slip through. They would lay to rest any concerns of exhibitors who have always hitherto enjoyed free trading on a Sunday.

Amendment No. 7 would allow large farm shops to trade at any hour on a Sunday instead of being restricted to six hours trading like other large stores. Up to a point, shops on farms have always been in a privileged position regarding Sunday trading. Section 58 of the 1950 Act allows on a Sunday

"the sale at a farm, of produce produced thereon".

That provision was intended to provide that, if a farmer sold a customer some of his own produce, he would not be in breach of the Sunday trading provisions.

Times have changed, however, and some of the farm shops now in operation are larger than 3,000 sq ft. If those shops have been trading on a Sunday they may well have been doing so in breach of the 1950 Act by selling far more than the produce of the farm on which they are situated. Whatever the potential anomaly in allowing a large shop to open at any hour on a Sunday, as long as it is on a farm and sells wholly or mainly home-grown produce, the practical effect of the amendment would be very limited.

Amendment No. 8 would extend the list of those large shops that the Bill allows to open beyond six hours to include shops where the goods sold were "wholly or mainly" motor and cycle supplies. The 1950 Act allows the sale of motor and cycle supplies and accessories on a

Sunday. Partly as a result of that provision, large motor supplies shops, such as Halfords, have been trading all day on a Sunday for a considerable number of years. Such retailers have managed their business, at least in part, on the assumption that all-day trading on Sunday is a lawful activity for them.

Amendment No. 10 concerns pharmacies. Under the 1950 Act, pharmacies may sell medicines and medical and surgical appliances on a Sunday. That reflects the fact that, irrespective of the general considerations that Parliament might wish to apply to Sunday trading, it should be possible for a pharmacy to open at any time on a Sunday to dispense medicine and sell products that can genuinely be considered to have a medical application.

The Bill as originally worded provided an exemption only for the sale of medicinal products and surgical appliances. That meant that items such as thermometers could not be sold by large pharmacies outside the six permitted hours on a Sunday. The amendment simply allows large pharmacies to sell those items that, under current legislation, they are permitted to sell on Sunday outside the new six-hour period—for example, when they are on rota duty.

I make those points for clarification. The Government are, of course, entirely content for the House to decide freely upon the amendments.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The debate has fallen rather earlier than some may have anticipated, but it is good to see that so many hon. Members are in their place.

The Sunday Trading Bill and the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) have been debated in the Chamber and in the other place for what seems to have been an interminable time. The Minister will be as pleased as everyone else in Parliament when this matter is finally resolved.

May I say at the outset of consideration of the Lords amendments that, although those of us opposed to Sunday trading regretted the measures agreed at an earlier stage, we felt that at least a commitment to compromise had been made. Indeed, the word was used both by the Minister and other hon. Members at various stages. Having been amended in another place, the idea that the Bill remains a compromise has now been blown out of the water.

The shopping hours reform lobby has abused the law, spent its millions and bought its preferred option at bargain basement prices from legislators who salve their consciences at the expense of families, communities, low-paid shop workers and small businesses. Everything we warned about in this Chamber during the earlier stages of the Bill has now come to pass. Every commodity under the sun is now on sale on Sundays. Employees who once spent Sundays with their families are now forced to work, and the special traditional nature of one day of peace and quiet has been destroyed by mercenaries whose only ideals may be measured in sterling.

The Bill was sold on the basis of the right to shop. That flaccid language of rights and choice, shorn of reference to duties, obligations or responsibilities, hides the real cost of Sunday trading. Thoreau once said that, if we cut down the trees, the birds will no longer be able to sing. By destroying Sunday as a unique day, ordinary people will lose the opportunity to spend time with one another, their families and relatives, and to have a day of tranquillity away from the hustle and bustle of every other day of shopping.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): The hon. Gentleman makes many presumptions. He presumes that the House will agree with the Lords amendments. He should wait for the debate.

Mr. Alton: Far from waiting for the debate, I am participating in it, and trying to persuade the hon. Gentleman, who has been one of the leading advocates of Sunday trading, that he should join us in the Lobby later, should it be necessary, to oppose the Lords amendments.

The noble Lord Earl Ferrers, the Minister dealing with Sunday trading in the other place, said:

"I would add just one personal caveat. I have mentioned it before, and I do so without any form of direction. I think that we should be careful about bringing into the Bill a great number of additional exceptions. We have already agreed an exception for motor supply shops. If all the exceptions which have been proposed were accepted, we might well find, as my noble friend Lady Young has said, that the reform is becoming largely indistinguishable from the total deregulation which this place has already rejected."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 April 1994; Vol. 553, c. 1682-3.]

Thus, the Home Office Minister in another place has said that, were the amendments then before the other place accepted, the Bill would become indistinguishable from the total deregulation which the House of Commons had earlier rejected. I remind hon. Members that those amendments are now incorporated in the Bill, and we are invited to vote on them this afternoon.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): The hon. Gentleman mentioned motor accessory shops. We are not changing the law on those, as they have been allowed to trade since 1950. If his wife or children were to break down on a Sunday and wanted a part for their car, he would not want them stranded on the motorway because the shop had closed. We are not changing the law, but simply putting it back.

Mr. Alton: I take that point. I am not dealing with all the amendments in precisely the same way. I shall come to the detail in a moment.

We should listen carefully to the warning of the noble Lord Earl Ferrers, that, if a range of new exemptions and exceptions were agreed, the carefully crafted compromise made in this House would be placed in jeopardy. The compromise left many of us cold, because we still said that Sundays should remain a special day.

Amendment No. 7 deals with farm shops. I feel strongly that it is unnecessary. When considering its merits, it is important to do so from a rational perspective. Were the amendment passed, any farm shop which had an internal floor area exceeding 280 sq m or 3,000 sq ft or, from another perspective, was larger than the Chamber of the House of Commons could open for unlimited hours on Sundays. How many farm shops fall within that category, and what is the nature of their business? I hope that the Minister will answer those points.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Those are not my amendments, but I have explained them to the House. The hon. Gentleman has given only half the picture and, in fairness to the House, he should give the whole picture. Only shops situated on a farm that sell products wholly or mainly supplied from that farm will fall within the scope of the amendment. So it is drastically restricted, as I said in my explanation.

Mr. Alton: That makes the measurements which I gave the House sound equally absurd. What sort of business will be able to produce such a volume? I am arguing that the amendment is unnecessary.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I urge the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the efficient use of space by farm shops. In my experience, they are often located within large barns, so are comfortably in excess of the floor area that he mentioned, although they are genuinely small businesses of the kind that he and I are trying to protect.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Another issue is why farm shops need to open for longer than six hours on Sundays, given that they will not provide an emergency service. Any farm shop that exceeds 280 sq m must be entering into significant commercial activity, selling a wide variety of products to attract sufficient custom to remain profitable.

While the amendment requires farm shops to sell at least 51 per cent. of goods produced on the farm in question, it further permits the shop to sell up to 49 per cent. of other goods, such as other foodstuffs, tourist souvenirs, gardening equipment and garden furniture. As a consequence, the amendment would create further unfair competition and anomalies within the Bill, giving preferential treatment and trading advantage to one type of retailer over another.

Could not the type of store envisaged as opening under this provision more accurately be described as a garden centre, grocery store, supermarket, or even tourist shop, rather than a traditional farm shop? It is unfair to permit large farm shops to open beyond the six-hour limit, when supermarkets, tourist shops—and, depending on the outcome of a later amendment, garden centres—will be required to close after six hours.

Amendment No. 7 also represents the liberalising of the existing law, so it also jeopardises the carefully crafted agreements previously worked out in this House. Under section 58 of the Shops Act 1950, farm shops, regardless of size, are permitted to open all day on Sundays, but only to sell produce produced thereon. Under this amendment, while farm shops will be allowed to sell 51 per cent. of their own-grown produce, they will also be free to sell up to 49 per cent. of goods brought in from outside.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the marvellous garden show in London. Only recently, it disclosed that exhibitors buy most of the flowers on their stalls elsewhere. Would not even the large farm shops import goods that were not produced on their farm if they were allowed an opportunity to trade for more than six hours? Would not that be unfair?

Mr. Alton: It would indeed. As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) rightly described, it would be another element of unfair competition, which is at the heart of the arguments that he, I and other hon. Members in all parts of the House have advanced against the Bill throughout. It will inevitably destroy smaller businesses, it will inevitably build in unfair competition and it will greatly damage the traditional tranquillity that families and communities have enjoyed on a Sunday when it has been a special day.

Amendment No. 8 deals with motor and cycle supply outlets. The Royal Automobile Club and the Automobile Association have widely distributed briefings to Members which argue in favour of amendment No. 6, in permitting large motor and cycle supply outlets—those of more than 280 sq m—to open for unlimited, as opposed to six-hour, Sunday trading. The main thrust of the RAC and AA argument is:

"The House of Lords amendment is a technical amendment to the Bill. It does NOT seek a new concession for motorists but merely seeks to maintain the current legal position for motoring supply outlets".

They say that large motor supply outlets provide an emergency service on Sunday, and that if those large centres were restricted to six hours' opening on Sunday, lives—the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) intimated that too—would be put at risk and significant inconvenience would be caused to motorists.

That is misleading in several respects. Amendment No. 6 represents a significant liberalisation of the law. To argue that the Lords—

Mr. Luff *rose—*

Mr. Alton: If I may advance for a moment, I shall happily give way.

Mr. Luff: It is a short point. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is speaking to amendment No. 8, not amendment No. 6. I wish to clarify that.

Mr. Alton: I am speaking about amendment No. 8, but it also involves amendment No. 6. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the list of amendments, he will see that that is the case.

To argue that Lords amendment No. 6 is a technical amendment which merely retains an existing exemption already granted to motor and cycle supply outlets is inaccurate and highly misleading. The House of Lords amendment is far broader in scope than the existing law governing motor or cycle supply outlets on Sunday.

The Shops Act 1950 exempts motor and cycle supply outlets to open on Sundays regardless of size, but only to sell a narrow range of products. Schedule 5 to the Shops Act 1950 states that a shop may open for the serving of customers on Sundays for the sale of

"aircraft, motor, or cycle supplies or accessories".

The courts have always interpreted that provision narrowly, ruling that neither a pair of tights converted for use as a fan belt nor a fridge to be installed in a caravan were motor supplies or accessories. Rather, the term

"motor, or cycle supplies or accessories"

has been interpreted to include only items that are directly usable for mechanical purposes, to service a motor vehicle or bicycle or, in certain circumstances, to decorate a vehicle, for example, furry dice. It is worth noting that that definition would not include new or second-hand cars or bicycles, but rather only parts for them.

In contrast, the proposed amendment exempts large motor or cycle outlets to open to sell their full range of products for unlimited hours on Sundays, provided that

"the trade or business carried on"

in the shop

"consists wholly or mainly of the sale of any one or more of the following—

(i) motor supplies and accessories, and

(ii) cycle supplies and accessories".

The key term used in the amendment is "wholly or mainly". Although that term will be the subject of judicial interpretation, it is expected that, for the purposes of the Bill, it will mean 51 per cent. turnover.

Consequently, if the amendment were accepted today, motor or cycle supply outlets such as Halfords would be able to open for unlimited hours on Sundays, with up to 49 per cent. of their sales coming from goods that may not lawfully be sold under the existing law.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire) *rose—*

Mr. Alton: I wish to make a little progress.

Stores such as Halfords would be free to extend their business activities significantly—for example, to sell equipment for use in caravans, for tourists, maps, camping equipment, picnic ware and so on, and continue to open for unlimited hours on Sundays, whereas their competitors are required to close after six hours.

The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) and the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) are probably anxious that I discuss emergency services, so I shall discuss that now. I ask the Minister to clarify whether the emergency services such as the RAC and AA rely on outlets such as Halfords for the supply of repair parts on Sundays. I believe that the AA and the RAC carry most general spare parts with them in their vans. The need to have access to stores such as Halfords on Sundays is minimal.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) *rose—*

5.45 pm

Mr. Alton: Please would the hon. Gentleman wait?

Most RAC and AA vans do not carry a wide range of specialised parts designed for specific markets or cars. However, I believe that the emergency services tend to rely on specialist traders, which mainly operate out of garage sites, to supply those parts, as opposed to the general high street traders.

The RAC and AA, in their briefings, have said that 30 per cent.—that is 330,000—of breakdowns take place after 6 pm on Sundays. It must be asked, however, how many of those breakdowns involve the use of spare parts that are not usually carried in AA or RAC vans, and which are supplied in stores such as Halfords. In addition, I hope that the Minister will say how many of those cases would involve the car being repaired on Sundays, as opposed to being towed away and repaired on Monday morning.

It should further be noted that small motor supply outlets are exempted under the Bill to open for unlimited hours on Sundays. If there is significant and sufficient demand for spare parts before 10 pm and after 6 pm on Sundays, those smaller outlets will undoubtedly remain open, adding to the number of shops and premises that trade on Sunday.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Alton: I shall finish the argument, and then I shall give way.

I do not believe that adequate evidence is available to establish that large motor and cycle supply shops provide an emergency service on Sundays during the early mornings or evening hours which neither can be nor is being met by small motor outlets or specialist dealers who supply the RAC and AA direct. The acceptance of amendment No. 6 will only increase the anomalies—[HON. MEMBERS: "Amendment No. 8."]—amendment No. 8, and I think as it affects amendment No. 6 earlier. It will only increase the unfair competition and difficulties of enforcement already created in the Bill.

I happily give way to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. We have worked on several Committees, including the Committee that considered the Shops (Amendment) Bill of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), and the Committee on the Bill that we are debating.

Does he accept that, if he were to remove the "wholly or mainly" from the definition of the supply of goods in stores such as Halfords, which was one of his arguments, people—not the RAC or the AA, but people who do their own car maintenance—might buy spark plugs but be unable to buy a spark plug spanner or, perhaps more worryingly, be able to buy brake pads but not the right tool kit to put the brake pads in? Although he may be of sufficient wealth to have his car serviced by professional organisations, does he accept that many people in this country do their own servicing?

Mr. Alton: Of course I accept that, and I do not think that it will impinge on them, as the present law has failed to do in the past. There is no reason why people should be inconvenienced. It is simply that, if we do not want, as I do not—the hon. Gentleman and I entirely disagree about that—large numbers of extra retail outlets to open throughout the country, we must be careful not to provide, as we have in this legislation, so much coach-and-horses provision that anyone and everyone will be able to open at every hour of the day and the night.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I accept the anxieties that the hon. Gentleman expresses about the notion of large stores being added to the ones that already open. However, does he accept that the number of makes of motor cars nowadays is so great that it is possible that only large stores will have the correct, and sufficient numbers of, spare parts to suit any one of any range of cars? That argument is the most powerful, I think, and it is for that reason—and the fact that, under the old law, Halfords and other large motor spare stores have been allowed to build—that they have extended and expanded their services.

Mr. Alton: I should have thought that it was the other way round—that cars of a more marginal nature, which are not supplied by one of the big car manufacturers, would be most likely to be affected in the way that the right hon. Lady describes. I should have thought that every other trading day, when those outlets are open and people can provide themselves with the spare parts and pieces they need, would provide them with sufficient opportunity to do so without having to extend that time as the amendments seek to do.

I think that the Minister will agree that we attempted, during long, laborious hours in Committee, on Report and during the various debates on the Shops (Amendment) Bill, to reach a sensible agreement. We all accepted that there would be some anomaly. We all admitted that there were massive anomalies in the Shops Act 1950. There are bound to be anomalies in any legislation that the House passes, but we do not need to add to them. Some of the Lords amendments seem to do that and, worse, they seem to undermine the law by trying to push still further the case for wholesale liberalisation. That was what the noble Earl

[Mr. Alton]

Ferrers argued when the Bill was in the other place. That carefully crafted, constructive compromise is at stake today.

We will not be able radically to change the nature of the Bill at this late stage. The message that will be sent out to people who have observed the proceedings governing the Bill and who have followed the arguments throughout will be that yet another aspect of the debate has gone by default. They will receive the message that yet another loss has been occasioned because of the legislators' failure to safeguard what has traditionally been the one special day enjoyed by families and communities the length and breadth of the land. It is for those reasons that I have raised my opposition and questions to the Lords amendments.

Dame Angela Rumbold: I wish to make a few simple arguments in support of Lords amendment No. 8. The most telling point in the amendment is that it simply restores the legislation that existed before we entered on the laborious and lengthy exercise of trying to modernise the Shops Act 1950.

The subject of amendment No. 8 is the one sphere in which the 1950 Act made an exception. The number of people who now own cars has risen substantially since 1950, when there were 2.3 million. There are now, in 1994, perhaps regrettably, 22 million car owners. In 2000, there are likely to be 25 million car owners.

We must not assume that every one of those car owners will be able to enjoy the pleasures of membership of one of the motoring organisations. There are currently 10 million people who are not members of a motoring organisation and depend entirely on their own resources and access to spares to make their cars roadworthy. Until now, they have been able to go to Halfords or a large store with a wide range of spare parts for cars and motor cycles on a Sunday if their vehicle was not functioning in order to repair it so that it would function on Monday through to Saturday.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who oppose the amendment could do so logically if the law also said that breakdowns could not occur on Sundays?

Dame Angela Rumbold: I am not entirely sure whether I agree with my hon. Friend, but hon. Members can make up their own minds.

I sincerely believe that we should not attempt to make the Bill more restrictive than necessary. I have no problems with my position; I have never been anything other than a total deregulator on the issue. I am sad that we have had to impose restrictions, but I am glad that we have at least some agreement in the House on the sort of restrictions that we have agreed to accept. I am concerned that we should not now renege on those agreements by saying that we want to impose a greater restriction on the sale of motor spares than existed in the 1950 Act. I ask my colleagues to consider the subject carefully and to support the Lords amendment No. 8.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I shall not delay the House long. I shall not reiterate the detailed points made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), as he made them extremely well.

I shall deal with the principle of whether or not the regulations are tightly in place. I see that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has just entered the Chamber, so I shall use the words of his national poet, Dylan Thomas:

"Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means
. . . and the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams."

The sabbath rang slowly, but the sabbath will never ring slowly again as a result of the decision that we have made. I believe that we shall come to rue the day that we passed the Sunday Trading Bill. In principle, we should seek to keep Sunday as a special day, and resist the amendments before us.

Mr. Luff: I had not intended to intervene in the debate on this group of amendments, but in view of the confusion over amendment numbers in the speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), I think that it is important to clarify the issue.

The hon. Gentleman repeatedly referred to amendment No. 6 in relation to motor supplies and cycle supplies, but amendment No. 6 relates to exemptions for stands at exhibitions, as does amendment No. 11. I hope that amendments Nos. 6 and 11 will not attract any controversy in the House. The amendments to exempt exhibition stands from the provisions of the Sunday Trading Bill are genuinely technical. Exhibitions are not generally affected by the Bill, and the amendments are simply to ensure that individual stands in exhibitions, which might otherwise fall within the definition of a shop, are not affected either.

The amendments are minor, but they are important to the exhibition industry of the United Kingdom if our venues are to be able to compete on an equal basis with exhibition venues overseas, particularly in the European single market. The amendments do not undermine the Bill's principle or provide a loophole in the law. The term "exhibition" has already been defined, so it remains a question of fact. For this purpose, in any dispute about whether something constitutes an exhibition, the courts can decide on the facts on the basis "you know an exhibition when you see one".

The Sunday Trading Bill provides the Secretary of State with the power simply to continue with existing exemptions in local legislation for some venues such as Earls Court, Olympia and the National Exhibition Centre outside Birmingham. Amendments Nos. 6 and 11 ensure that exhibition venues throughout the countries of England and Wales are treated on an equal footing with other venues, with one rule being applied to all. I hope that they will command universal support in the House.

Mrs. Peacock: I should like to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) with a word on amendments Nos. 6 and 11, which are important, not only to the exhibition industry, but to manufacturing industry, many of whose members exhibit at exhibitions that commence on Sundays. Sunday is the very day that retailers are able to visit exhibitions to order and buy goods for sale in their shops. It is most important that we do not impose any restrictions that could affect our manufacturing industry.

As chairman of the House of Commons motor club, I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister about amendment No. 8, which has been sensibly placed in the Bill by their

Lordships. Perhaps the original legislation should have contained the provision—I certainly want to see it continued.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) said, more than 10 million car owners in this country do not belong to the AA or the RAC. None of us wants to see young families or anyone else stranded and having to wait until the shops open the next morning to buy the necessary parts to repair their car if it breaks down after hours. I hope that the House will recognise that.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I think that the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) has completed her speech.

6 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I have circulated amendment No. 10 to most hon. Members, as it principally affects a constituency company, Boots. It reinstates in the Bill provisions that originally existed in relation to pharmacists. The pharmacists do not seek additional hours or changes in the hours, but want to be allowed to sell products that are essential for people's health. Pharmacists have been able to sell those products until now, and the amendment restores the original position without affecting the opening hours.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No 6 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 7, in page 4, line 44, at end insert—

("(za) any shop which is at a farm and where the trade or business carried on consists wholly or mainly of the sale of produce from that farm,")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

The House divided: Ayes 246, Noes 191.

Division No. 269] **[6.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyes, Roland
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Flynn, Paul
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mandelson, Peter
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter

Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir George Gardiner and Mr. Michael Fabricant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blunkett, David
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clelland, David
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dover, Den
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Neubert, Sir Michael
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rogers, Allan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Warsing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and Mr. William O'Brien.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 8 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 4, line 46, at end insert—

("(bb) any shop which is a nursery, garden centre or do-it-yourself home improvement shop, or a combination of these, and where the trade or business carried on consists wholly or mainly of the sale of any one or more of the following—

(i) plants,

(ii) garden supplies and accessories, and

(iii) materials and tools suitable for use in the construction, maintenance, repair or decoration of buildings,")

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 12.

Mr. Lloyd: We have just debated a group of amendments that made some limited exemptions from the six-hour restrictions on Sunday trading by outlets measuring more than 3,000 sq ft. Lords amendment No. 9, however, would liberate many more outlets from that rule by adding the larger nurseries, garden centres and DIY shops to the exempt category. Again, it is for the House to judge the extent to which it wishes to dilute the large shop-small shop compromise that it reached some months ago; but I draw hon. Members' attention to the questions of definition and enforcement that are involved, as I believe that the answers that they give to those questions should be taken into account in the decision that the House reaches.

I understand that garden centres and DIY shops were linked in the same amendment in another place because its sponsors felt that it was extremely difficult to draw a clear distinction between garden centres—which sell garden furniture, as do many DIY shops—and DIY shops, which sell paving slabs and gravel like many garden centres. Both

often sell lawn mowers, power tools, barbecue equipment and Christmas decorations; indeed, many DIY shops sell plants and shrubs. It would certainly be very hard to distinguish their product ranges at law.

There is also a problem in distinguishing DIY and garden centres clearly from other shops. Many department stores sell garden furniture, power tools and lawn mowers. Many self-styled DIY shops sell flat-pack furniture, kitchen units, carpets, toys, curtains and a range of other products that are commonly found in a large number of shops that do not currently claim to be DIYs. If the amendments were carried, it would not be surprising if some of those other shops claimed quite convincingly that they were DIY shops as well—or hastened to adjust their range of goods to qualify under any definition that might be constructed to distinguish them. I hope, therefore, that the House will consider with care the law enforcement task that they will be placing on local authorities. To work effectively, the law must have sufficient clarity. We all know that the anomalies in the Shops Act 1950 made it difficult for local authorities to apply the law in practice, which led to the law being increasingly flouted. We should take care to ensure that that does not happen again.

Another reason why local authorities became reluctant to try to enforce the Act was that the public increasingly began to feel that it was unfair. The House will thus want to consider whether a DIY shop selling power tools when a department store cannot, or a large garden centre selling pet food, as many do, while a large pet shop must stay shut will be felt to be fair by the public. It is for the House freely to decide who may open and when, but all hon. Members, whatever our views on Sunday shopping and wherever we stand in the spectrum—whether we believe in greater restriction than the Bill would provide or whether we would deregulate entirely—want the law that we finally put on the statute book to be readily enforceable by the local authorities and the courts and to be regarded by the public and the retail trade as reasonable and fair.

Mr. Alton: The Minister's warning is well timed and well made. I hope that hon. Members will recall what he said when they vote. Will he confirm that we are not dealing with small enterprises and businesses, because about a third of DIY shops' output—about £1 billion—is of non-DIY merchandise? We are not talking about small beer by any means.

Mr. Lloyd: I cannot confirm the figure, but it is substantial. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

If the House does not agree Lords amendment No. 9, with your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall move a manuscript amendment to Lords amendment No. 12 to remove the reference to Lords amendment No. 9.

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The Minister has been helpful. Despite being a self-confessed deregulator, he has—perhaps in slightly veiled language, but probably clearly—drawn the House's attention to the dangers of accepting the amendments.

I carefully read the debates in the other place. The amendments were part of a wide group of amendments, of which Lords amendment No. 9 was successful. The debate focused almost entirely on the desirability of activities such as going to garden centres and DIY shops and on leisure activities and how enjoyable they were. There was talk of there being more browsing than buying on such occasions, which was coupled with dire warnings of loss of trade if restrictions were placed on hours. In that debate, it seemed that, because customers' activities were associated with leisure, all other considerations that had previously applied in debates on the Bill were forgotten.

The proposal appears to have been made without any reference to the way in which the consensus grew in the House in favour of extending Sunday trading. Indeed, a similar consensus had initially been reached in the other place—that the opening hours of large enterprises should be restricted.

As we have heard, those enterprises have the greatest impact on our way of life on a Sunday. They have the greatest impact on staff conditions and terms of employment, on vehicle movements as people shop in them and on the environment because of deliveries and other such factors and because of the noise pollution that is associated with shoppers arriving and leaving in their cars. Both Houses rightly felt that restricting those enterprises to six hours of trading between 10 am and 6 pm on a Sunday was sufficient and that, if any compromise were to be consistent with preserving the special nature of Sunday, there should be only limited exemptions to the provision. I believe that those exemptions are substantial.

I have considerable sympathy with genuine horticulturists. Many small family firms have been in business for a long time and have traded without restrictions on a Sunday. We can well understand how they feel and we question the proposal in the Lords amendments, which did not give exemptions to small family firms of nursery men and women and did not properly explore the question of employee exemptions.

The horticulturists' association has advanced powerful arguments about the seasonal nature of their work, the rural location of businesses and the family interests involved. We cannot, however, properly consider them and weigh the evidence before we vote tonight because the amendments do not offer us a choice. They couple nurseries with garden centres and DIY shops. Many of the enterprises to which the amendments refer are large, are owned by large companies with multiple interests and, in urban areas, are located on sites where there is a combination of a garden centre and a DIY shop.

I vouch for the fact that there is interest in gardening in urban regions. I know how popular garden centres are. Even in urban areas, particularly those in my constituency, many small garden centres are essentially large houses with their own private grounds from which plants are grown and supplied. I remind hon. Members that centres that fall under the 3,000 sq ft restriction will not be caught and that the amendments are not relevant to them. The large centres, which hon. Members will know many examples of and which combine DIY shops with garden centres, posed problems, as the Minister suggested, when drafting the amendments and led to the coupling of the two types of enterprise. That is the weakness of the amendments. Lord Norrie said:

> "We all know a garden centre and a home improvement store when we see one."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 April 1994; Vol. 553, c. 1670.]

We probably do today, but in past decades, the types of stores, the produce that they offer and their selling techniques have changed enormously. We were conscious of that when we looked back to the 1950 Act. We must recognise that there will be changes and diversification and that it will be extremely difficult to distinguish, as it is

[Ms Joan Ruddock]

already in some cases, DIY shops from other stores or a garden centre that sells many products other than plants and immediately associated goods.

Courts, a high street stores group, sent out a letter, which I am sure all hon. Members received. It talks about DIY stores offering for sale not those items that we use for home improvements, but kitchen items, tables, bunk beds, mattresses, pillows, duvets, cutlery and glassware. That is a huge list, backed up with photographs, so that we can all see how impossible it is to find a definition—or at least, a definition that would stand any reasonable test—of the difference between centres that have primarily DIY goods and those that have a range of very similar products, or the same products, and a lesser range of DIY tools and equipment.

If the amendments were agreed to, they would drive a coach and horses through the Bill. They would totally undermine the regulation, and the policing of that regulation, that the House set in train. Simplicity is at the heart of the Bill, as it was at its heart when it left the House—simplicity based on a size definition, which for all goods and services that are not urgent necessities made a distinction between premises larger than 3,000 sq ft and smaller premises. If we passed the amendment, it would signal a step-by-step move towards total deregulation.

6.30 pm

Let me remind hon. Members that both Houses overwhelmingly rejected total deregulation of Sunday trading. Both Houses also fundamentally endorsed a compromise, in which there would be no restriction on opening for small shops, thus giving them a competitive edge in trading opportunities, but a six-hour limit for larger enterprises. That fundamental compromise not only gained the consent of both Houses, but, as is equally important, was supported by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and by the group of major retailers organised into the Shopping Hours Reform Council.

The Lords amendments would fatally undermine the basic premise on which the Bill was constructed—a regulated extension of Sunday trading. For those reasons I shall vote against them, and although I acknowledge that there will be a free vote, I hope that many or all of my colleagues will follow me in opposing amendments that effectively wreck a Bill for which consent in the House was so hard won.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I disagree with the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), and I intend to put the opposite case. Not only am I chairman of the Conservative parliamentary horticulture committee, but for a number of years I have been parliamentary consultant to the Horticultural Trades Association, which represents virtually all the garden centres in the country.

During that time I have come to know the way in which the industry operates. I know the people who work in it and the people who use it. It is a diverse industry: at one end there are the large chains of garden centres, many attached to DIY stores, all of which employ a substantial number of people; at the other end are the small family businesses in which a few people work all the hours that God gives them to make a living out of something that they love, and about which they are passionate.

Another thing that I have learnt is how important garden centres are to the British people. Gardening is the most popular pastime in this country. It knows no social bounds; it is a great leveller; it captivates the wealthy man with his rolling acres and the poor man with his allotment. Every hon. Member has thousands of constituents who earn their living from garden centres, or much of whose leisure time revolves around them.

The Lords amendments, which are designed to exempt garden centres and DIY stores from the six-hour restriction on Sunday opening, are eminently sensible. Let us consider what difference it would make to our Sundays if we agreed to them.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Lady makes a compelling case for garden centres, which would attract huge sympathy and agreement in the House, but in view of the failure to table any other amendments to the Lords amendments, would we not face a problem with the entanglement between the concept of DIY stores, which the hon. Lady mentioned only cursorily, and that of garden centres? Does the hon. Lady agree that as we are not to be given the chance to vote in a way that would distinguish between the two but have to vote for or against both, we are faced with "like it or lump it" amendments?

Mrs. Roe: The hon. Gentleman may have some problems in that connection, and I sympathise with him, but there may be hon. Members on both sides of the House who would be happy for the amendments made by the House of Lords to be agreed to. It is for hon. Members to make their own decisions on the Lords amendments before us.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): It has already been said that DIY shops tend to sell flat-pack furniture. Anyone who has ever bought any of that, whether a full kitchen or simply a chest of drawers, cannot but be aware how much DIY that involves—too much, as far as I am concerned. I know that it is not popular in the House to admit that one buys one's own furniture, let alone has to put it together when one gets home, but there is definitely a large element of DIY involved in purchasing the sort of furniture sold in such shops.

Mrs. Roe: I fully agree with my hon. Friend, who has made a valid point.

Let us consider what difference the passing of the amendments would make to our Sundays. I believe that no change whatever would result, and I shall explain why. There would certainly be no need for any more policing; more people would not need to work longer hours, and we would not need to allow any new activities that we have not happily allowed to take place for years. The truth is that the amendments would simply maintain the status quo, and would allow millions of people—our constituents—to carry on doing what they already do on Sundays.

The big question is why on earth the provision was not included in the original compromise option? If the deregulation option had been chosen, garden centres would have been allowed to open, and if the Keep Sunday Special option had won, garden centres would have been exempted, so why did not the compromise between those two extremes include that element, which was acceptable to both? I do not think that anyone knows. It seems to many people that it was a mistake. It is now up to both

Houses to consider and refine the legislation and to correct such mistakes, and that is just what amendment No. 9 would do.

I cannot accept the argument that we should oppose the amendment, not because it is not sensible—obviously it is sensible—but because it goes against some ill-defined principle. I have said what would happen if we agreed to the amendment. Now let us consider what would happen if we opposed it. Who would gain? I cannot think of anyone who would benefit from new restrictions being imposed on garden centres and DIY stores. Not those who work in them—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Roe: May I move on? Then I shall give way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It will be too late then.

Mrs. Roe: Who would gain? Not those who work in them—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose—*

Mrs. Roe: I am sure that the hon. Lady's point will be well made, and she will be able to make it in a few moments.

No one would benefit—certainly not those who work or shop in the businesses concerned. So who would lose? That is far more apparent. Many of our constituents would lose—people who own such stores, people who work in them and people who visit them.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way now?

Mrs. Roe: If the hon. Lady will give me a few more moments I will give way to her. All of us have thousands of constituents who will suffer if we oppose the amendment just because of some ill-defined principle.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Lady said that she could not think of anyone who would lose by the amendment. She obviously does not live near a do-it-yourself shop.

Mrs. Roe: I do.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Lady will lose, then. She also knows who will gain if the amendment is defeated—those who live near do-it-yourself shops and who rely on a little peace on Sunday. They will not get it if the amendment is passed.

Mrs. Roe: I actually said that I believed that the status quo was what we wished to achieve. Many people use the garden centres and the DIY stores. If the hon. Lady will give me time, I will show in a moment exactly what happens when the hours are restricted and the sort of reaction that we are likely to find among our constituents.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): As my hon. Friend knows, I am on the council of the Garden Industries Federation. She was talking about losers. It is clear to me that a group of people who would also lose are those who work in companies, often small companies, manufacturing garden equipment for sale. They would lose because the majority of their sales are made on a Sunday. The biggest day in the year is Easter Sunday. If we want to maintain employment, we should give a proper outlet to the good products that are made in this country.

Mrs. Roe: My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle) makes a good point and I am grateful for his support. He is extremely knowledgeable in this matter, and I assure the House that he knows what he is talking about.

It is difficult to judge what the customers will think. Most do not yet realise what is going on in Westminster. In Northampton during March this year all the DIY shops and garden centres opened on Sunday only for the hours that would be available to them if we reject the amendment —that is, from 10 am to 4 pm. On those four Sundays, literally thousands of people turned up before 10 am and after 4 pm. They were working in their homes and gardens and they needed equipment and supplies. We must realise that for most working people Sunday is the only day on which they can buy those supplies. More than 6 million people visit garden centres every Sunday. The people in Northampton were amazed and angered at what they found and could not believe that Members of Parliament were considering restricting garden centres and DIY stores. When they were told that restrictions were indeed being considered, many questioned whether Members of Parliament lived in the real world.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Will my hon. Friend again acknowledge that many hon. Members have no desire to restrict the Sunday trading of small garden centres? Because of the size limit, many will not be affected. We are talking only about the larger garden centres, which many of us would not want to restrict if they were not linked to DIY centres. As the Lords amendment links the two, however, those of us who are fond of garden centres of all sizes but wish to block the DIY side have no choice but to vote against the amendment.

Mrs. Roe: It is up to my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) to make up his own mind on the amendment. I shall support it, and I am explaining to the House why.

The House may think that I exaggerate the effect of imposing new restrictions on garden centres and DIY shops on Sundays. Most garden centres do up to 40 per cent. of their weekly trade on Sunday alone; for DIY stores, the figure is around 30 per cent. Sunday is the most important trading day for them. If we reject the amendment, we shall artificially restrict the busiest day of our constituents' week. Let there be no doubt that if we reject the amendment we shall seriously damage the economic well-being of many of our constituents.

People I have met in the stores ask me what is going on. When I tell them that it is possible that their Sunday hours will be restricted, they cannot believe it. They want to know why we would cut their wages or even put their jobs at risk. To be honest, I do not know what the answer is.

Opposition Front-Bench Members—some of whom, I believe, are sponsored by the Co-operative movement—have persuaded their colleagues to vote against the amendment as a matter of principle. I in no way seek to make a party political point, but I cannot believe that any union really wants to inflict unemployment and reduced wages on workers, many of whom are union members, for absolutely no practical point.

6.45 pm

I have heard three arguments against the amendment. First, it is said that as a matter of principle we should not amend the agreed compromise. I have already shown that that argument is not valid. The chosen option is a compromise between two other options, both of which exempted garden centres. The omission of such stores from the option is a mistake. Without the amendment, the Bill will be a bad piece of legislation. It is our role and our duty to correct that mistake.

Secondly, I have heard it said that it will be difficult to police the exemption. But the exemption maintains the status quo, so the amendment will impose no greater burden on authorities than already exists. Thirdly, I hear it said that the amendment will allow unscrupulous retailers to get around the general six-hour rule by pretending to be a garden centre or DIY store. At a considerable stretch of the imagination, one might suppose that that could happen, but any sensible person looking at the matter objectively would soon realise that it simply would not happen. The amendment is so drafted that in the event of any dispute the onus is on the retailer to prove to a magistrate, first, that the store is a garden centre or DIY store and, secondly, that it sells wholly or mainly the prescribed goods. That double hurdle is a staunch test. Moreover, as all stores will be able to open for up to six hours on Sunday anyway, such a retailer is unlikely to risk a £50 fine just to open for an extra hour or two on a Sunday. In practice it will never happen, just as it has not happened under the current system.

I have been asked why DIY stores and garden centres are linked in the amendment. The answer is simple: in practice, there are inextricable links between the two types of store. Improving one's home is exactly the same sort of activity as improving one's garden. Many garden centres sell DIY items and most DIY stores have garden centres. The two types of store are a distinct sector of retailing and they cannot and should not be separated.

I understand that no party has whipped against the amendment tonight, so it is up to us to make up our own minds. That is how it was in the Lords. Indeed, the Labour peer Baroness Nicol, a staunch supporter of the Keep Sunday Special campaign, actually spoke in favour of the amendment. The choice is between some unfounded fears and an ill-defined principle on the one hand and the well-being of our constituents on the other. If hon. Members vote against the amendment, people will lose their jobs and their established leisure activities. Every hon. Member who votes against the amendment will be directly blamed by his or her constituents. I cannot believe that we can seriously consider forcing our garden centres and DIY stores to close on the very day when they are most active. As we already know, most people find it difficult to understand much of what we do in this remote Chamber; they will be totally incredulous if we vote today to close their garden centres and DIY stores.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) is plain wrong about the Lords amendment that she supports. It is simply not the case that passing the amendment would preserve the status quo in DIY stores. The status quo in DIY stores is that a large proportion of the trading that goes on is illegal. The Bill will make it legal to trade for a set number of hours on a Sunday. The status quo does not enable do-it-yourself stores to trade for unlimited hours on a Sunday. Those which do so are breaking the law and some of them are now facing quite large fines, which do not bother them very much because large fines to them were an engine for achieving a change in the law. Now, they ride on the backs of garden centres and hope to obtain unlimited trading on Sundays in stores in which a large part of the trade is not in DIY goods at all. They rely on the hon. Lady's genuine arguments on behalf of garden centres to obtain for them what they have been seeking all the time. They first tried the bully-boy tactics of hoping that, by simply breaking the law, they could get their way. They then appeared to support compromise measures, which have been carried through the House, and, finally, they overturned those compromises in favour of complete deregulation on Sundays. We in this House would be behaving quite unreasonably if we allowed anybody to get away with such tactics.

I have great sympathy with those garden centres which want to continue their present activities, but the proper course for those who feel that it requires amendment of the Bill as it originally left the House would be to seek amendment to the Lords amendments so as to narrow down the Bill and achieve that effect. Even then, we are talking only about larger garden centres and larger numbers of hours than the six hours which will be allowed in any event. The House must decide whether it is prepared to bring the issue of unlimited trading back into the high street. We are talking not only about the garden centre which is outside the main centre of population, but the DIY store in the high street and, even more, the DIY store in the shopping complex, which is putting the high street out of business. We are talking about the ability of those who have already posed a threat to the traditional high street to have unlimited trading on Sundays.

I urge hon. Members to heed the warnings from both Front Benches. It must be the first time that, during the proceedings of this Bill, I find myself in such substantial agreement with the Minister and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman and spokeswoman. On different points, they referred to the dangers which will arise if we allow the Lords amendment to stand.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is not it a fact that, in a year's time, if the amendment is allowed to stand as the Lords have agreed, we shall almost certainly hear electrical stores complaining that it is quite wrong that a DIY store may sell exactly what they are not allowed to sell in those extended hours? We shall therefore be asked, almost straightaway, to move further away and add further exclusions to the restrictions in the Bill.

Mr. Beith: That is absolutely right. One may almost say that anomalies are being prepared for the next stage of argument about anomalies. We have all seen the way in which the anomalies argument has been used in the Sunday trading issue to cast doubt on the propriety of obeying the law as it stands and to argue for changes in the law. Now, we shall see new anomalies built in to pave the way for further changes to the law beyond the compromise for which the House voted. It was not the compromise that I wanted. I wanted a more restrictive approach to Sunday trading, for reasons which other hon. Members have cited. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and the hon. Member for Broxbourne said, it drives a coach and horses through that compromise and brings back the whole issue of unregulated trading. Anyone who walks into Texas, or B and Q or any of the

large DIY stores can see that they are general stores, selling a wide range of merchandise—£1 billion of merchandise other than DIY goods. They shall be putting themselves in the unfair trading position that they have wanted all along if they secure the benefit of the amendment.

Therefore, I urge all hon. Members, especially those who have supported the Shopping Hours Reform Council and its proposals, to resist the amendment, which makes nonsense of everything that has been done up to now.

Mrs. Browning: I am pleased to have an opportunity to support the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe). Like her, I, too, support the Lords amendments. I have a particular interest in garden centres since, in my constituency, a large garden centre is a major employer in east Devon—Otter Nurseries, which is known throughout the county of Devon. It started off as, and still is, a family business run by Mr. and Mrs. White. Over the years, they have developed their business and their reputation and now employ some 160 people, including 65 people who are employed on a Sunday. Such is the nature of their business that people arrange coach trips to visit the garden centre. I visited it myself on a Sunday. I am aware how popular it is, early in the morning as well as late on a Sunday afternoon.

The economy of my constituency, especially the east Devon part, will be severely affected if the trading hours of that garden centre were to be restricted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne pointed out, the Shops Act 1950 permitted garden centres to sell produce—as they did —to motor accessory stores and farm shops. Therefore, restrictions on large garden centres such as Otter Nurseries would not enhance its ability to provide jobs or to provide a service to the public. It would detract from what it is already able to do under the law. It would be most unfortunate if the Bill, which is looking to free the market place more on a Sunday, adversely affected something such as a large garden centre. By garden centres and home improvement stores opening on a Sunday, their popularity with the public has become apparent.

Listening to some of the speeches from both sides of the House, I wonder about the argument that, if a DIY store were to open, it would be unfair competition to the regular furniture stores. DIY stores are not Harrods, delivering its cabinet furniture, delivered by two gentlemen wearing gloves. DIY stores sell a totally different range of furniture, as I pointed out in an intervention. Also, garden centres—

Mrs. Peacock: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Browning: May I finish this point and then I shall give way? Garden furniture or patio furniture is becoming increasingly popular. I recently had great difficulty in finding a couple of chairs with cushions on them in furniture stores in my constituency. The only place that I could buy them and be offered a choice was at Otter Nurseries in my constituency. Therefore, the idea that garden centres are selling Chippendale cabinets and putting Courts and other furniture companies out of business is somewhat unfounded. I wonder how many hon. Members put their own furniture together or do their own decorating, rather than have a little man come in to do it. I suspect that it is not that many.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend mentioned furniture. I have here four photographs. Three are of DIY stores, all selling pine furniture, and the fourth is of a furniture store selling pine furniture. Three stores would be allowed to open and one would not. What is her answer to that?

Mrs. Browning: Like my hon. Friend, I have also received those photographs. However, she will be aware that DIY stores require people to move their furniture home. There is a great difference between furniture shops, which offer a delivery service to their customers, and shops from where customers are prepared to struggle, with roof racks or rented vans, to take their furniture home themselves. I have studied those photographs very carefully and I have been round DIY stores, garden centres and furniture stores to see the way in which they market merchandise and there is a distinct difference between what happens to one as a customer when a purchase of furniture is made from a DIY store and what happens when one goes into a regular furniture retail outlet.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): Characteristically, a large trading estate sites Do It All, Allied Carpets, MFI and B and Q cheek by jowl. The hon. Lady is proposing that Do It All and B and Q should be allowed to open when we are telling Allied Carpets and MFI to shut shop. Allied Carpets sells carpets identical with those on sale at B and Q, which can be delivered. Doubtless, those carpets will be sold after 4 o'clock, when we will have told Allied to stop trading. Can she defend that?

Mrs. Browning: Yes, I can, because the right hon. Gentleman is referring to a very small number of ranges in which there is an overlap of interest. If one goes into a DIY store, one can see immediately whether it is a DIY store or a furniture store. There is certainly an overlap in certain ranges, but in the sort of DIY stores that have been mentioned tonight, such as Texas, one can see that it is a DIY store. The floor area is predominantly devoted to a whole range of things, from plumbing materials to decorating materials to paints and so on. The other lines that such stores carry are subsidiary lines. If we were to start precluding shops from opening simply because of an overlap of a small number of lines, it would be a great pity. In a way, it is a pity that we have not been able to separate the DIY interest from garden centres as I have a constituency interest with regard to garden centres. I would hate garden centres to be penalised simply because of the arguments against DIY stores trading.

Garden centres offer a much wider range of choice of services. In addition to plants, garden centres offer facilities for garden design. People enjoy going to Otter Nurseries for lunch or for tea in the afternoon. It is a whole-person experience. I would hate that whole-person experience to be restricted from 10 am to 4 pm. More seriously, there would be a grave effect on east Devon in my constituency. Many of my constituents would be disappointed about that, and I trust that the House will accept the Lords amendment and reject the opposition to it that has been voiced tonight.

7 pm

Mr. Ray Powell: I have listened to some of the arguments about garden centres and DIY stores and have tried to separate them. The difficulty when I presented my private Member's Bill was whether we should include garden centres or DIY stores. We listened to the arguments

[Mr. Ray Powell]

and agreed in Committee that we would accept the argument for garden centres to open, but on a restricted timetable.

Garden centres are ideal in April when we want to buy our plants to plant out. They are ideal in May, June, July and August when we see the lovely shrubs and flowers and when we can make a special garden from the flowers and plants that we can buy from garden centres. However, have you visited a garden centre in October, November or December, Mr. Deputy Speaker? If you visit one in December, you will find that it sells all sorts of Christmas decorations, toys and, as one would expect, Christmas trees. It will also sell deck chairs which can be bought as presents for the summer.

There is a garden centre in Pyle in a constituency near mine which sells all the types of furniture that one can buy in a DIY store. It would also be possible to buy a swimming pool on a Sunday from that garden centre, at whatever time one cared to visit it.

Arguments were raised in the Committee that examined my private Member's Bill to such an extent that the Committee agreed to include garden centres in my Bill. Before agreement was reached in that Committee, there was pressure from the DIY stores. It was argued then that if we allowed garden centres to open because gardening is a very popular hobby, we should not deny people who want to visit DIY stores to buy shelving or to buy goods to repair or decorate their homes. The arguments were such that we agreed to include DIY stores.

Of course, since 1986, the Government have been dragging their feet in respect of Sunday trading and the Shops Act 1950 despite the fact that DIY retailers were making millions of pounds at the expense of other retailers because the 1950 Act was not imposed on those who were breaking the law.

Nevertheless, we decided to include DIY stores in my Bill. However, because of the lack of time and the lack of Government and some Opposition support, my Bill fell. I had been lucky—if one can call it that—to come third in the ballot and seemed to have plenty of time for my legislation. Indeed, it had received plenty of support.

At that time, the Government were prepared to allow my Committee to do the spadework and to prepare a Bill so that, after stopping my Bill, they could step in and have a ready-prepared Bill themselves. When the Government introduced their Bill, they made many promises about partial deregulation.

We all accept that the debate about the future of Sunday trading has produced sharp divisions between retailers and consumers and within the general community. However, all have been united on one principle—the new law must be effective. As the Home Secretary said on Second Reading when he introduced the Bill:

"We want the option to work in practice and to command the respect throughout the country which the current regime sadly lacks."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 818.]

Much was made of the claim for the option chosen, although it was not my choice. It was said that it was relatively simple and straightforward. Large shops of more than 280 sq m were permitted to trade for up to six hours, with unrestricted trading for small shops plus a limited number of special categories. Left alone, that at least offered the prospect of an end to the anarchy in the high street which has offended so many people in recent years.

However, there was always a fear that certain retailers, indeed the very ones who had broken the existing law for longest and gained most from doing so, would continue to put self-interest before principle. Therefore, it is not particularly surprising, although it is regrettable, that the moment the ink was dry on the six-hour option formula which they had supported so vocally as the compromise option, the DIY and garden centre retailers were lobbying to gain exemption from that formula.

The DIY chains were a major force in the Shopping Hours Reform Council which lobbied for the six-hour option. A director of B and Q was seconded from that business to be deputy director of the SHRC.

In seeking exemption from the formula which they had designed, the DIY and garden centre lobbies have had a problem. It is not enough for them that they should be allowed to sell just goods for decorating the home and for gardening. That is no longer the nature of their business. Major DIY chains sell furniture, kitchens, lighting, telephones, small electrical items, blinds and carpets. Some of the most recent businesses to open have extended the list to furnishing fabrics, linens, large electrical goods, gifts, pictures and mirrors, china, glassware and cutlery. Between a quarter and a third of their sales may be in non-DIY goods.

In 1993, the Central Statistical Office published an analysis of sales by DIY shops in 1990 which showed that non-DIY merchandise then accounted for more than £1 billion—nearly 28 per cent.—of the retail sales of all DIY businesses. The source for that is Business Monitor SDA 25 Retailing 1990. That is broadly comparable in size to the total—all merchandise—of national sales for that year of John Lewis department stores, House of Fraser including Harrods, Debenhams, Dixons UK, Storehouse including British Home Stores, Habitat and Mothercare, and Argos.

In short, large DIY shops, and to a lesser extent garden centres, have become general traders in a wide range of goods. Therefore, they made representations to hon. Members that they should be allowed to trade without restriction if they are open wholly or mainly for the sale of DIY or gardening merchandise.

What does "wholly or mainly" mean? Much was made in the debate in another place of the view that Parliament should have confidence in the good sense of the courts. One of their Lordships indicated that the words "wholly or mainly" had been considered in revenue law where it means 90 per cent. But none of those who wish to permit unrestricted opening of DIY shops and garden centres can believe that that interpretation would apply here because few, if any, would qualify on that basis.

Moreover, the courts may be expected to show good sense that they can only implement the law passed by Parliament. Mr. Charles Flint, the Treasury counsel, said in an opinion that

"the effect of the current draft is that a DIY shop could lawfully sell a wide range of supplies, going beyond those to be used in the construction, maintenance, repair or decoration of the structure of dwellings, and the amount of such non-DIY supplies could amount to a substantial proportion of the sales made by the shop."

Furthermore, he says that

"as this is a criminal statute any ambiguity in interpretation will lead to it being considered in favour of a defendant who is prosecuted . . . the test of wholly or mainly must permit the shopkeeper to open the shop for a subsidiary purpose such as the sale of non-qualifying goods, even if that subsidiary purpose is not ancillary to the principal purpose of selling qualified goods; thus the shopkeeper who opens a shop for the principal purpose

of selling DIY goods could lawfully sell any other type of goods." That is the legal interpretation. We are all interested in the law, so we all understand that.

That raises again the question asked in another place but not answered by anyone. A large modern DIY store has anything up to 90,000 sq ft of selling space. What is to stop B and Q from diverting 40 per cent. or more of its space to merchandise from its sister business, Comet? By the same score, it would be technically possible for a Sainsbury-owned Homebase to incorporate a food supermarket within its perimeter. If branches of Comet traded for more than six hours because they were sited within the perimeter of B and Q shops, how would their Lordships expect the chairman of Dixons—and the owners of Dixons and Currys—to react? What would they expect local authorities to do to restrain Currys, which had opened illegally for more than six hours?

That is the argument. How will we enforce a restriction of six hours on DIY stores and garden centres which are blatantly trading, despite the Shops Act 1950 and despite breaking the law of Parliament? They are exploiting their position. How will we control them, and how will we ensure that the law that is passed is enforced?

These are not fancifully speculative considerations. Anyone who has observed the length to which some DIY traders have gone recently to exploit the loopholes in the current law cannot be sanguine about the use to which new loopholes may be put if they are allowed to remain in the Bill. Unless the amendment is rejected, the Bill will remain fatally flawed.

Since 1986, some of us, including the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), have spent a lot of time discussing the Bill and the anomalies. I am sure that we do not want to see a flawed Bill being accepted tonight. I hope that many hon. Members will join me in the Lobby to vote against it.

I am sponsored by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. I am not a consultant for any other union —as a matter of fact, I am not really a consultant for USDAW—*[Interruption.]* At least I still have my membership, unlike one of my colleagues on the Labour Front Bench—I shall not mention names. I received a letter dated 13 June from the deputy general secretary of USDAW. I shall read the final paragraph so that hon. Members clearly understand that I am on the union's side and I shall be going into whichever Lobby the union wants me to. USDAW is interested in ensuring that there is work for its employees, whether it be during the week or on a Sunday, but it still wants a restriction of six hours for its members who work in DIY stores and garden centres.

7.15 pm

The letter states:

"USDAW, therefore, calls upon"—

all Members of Parliament—

"to oppose the amendments in respect of Do-It-Yourself Stores and large Garden Centres, to ensure that the six hour compromise which has been accepted by both Houses is not undermined by belated opportunism."

We all accept that. I cannot understand where the deputy general secretary got the phrase "belated opportunism", because USDAW was a party to destroying the whole idea that we should reject the Bill as it presently stands.

I am pleased to hear the Minister say that at last he supports a Lords amendment which will totally destroy all the promises that he and the Government made about the six-hour compromise. Many Opposition Members fell into the trap of thinking that the six-hour compromise was the solution to the problem. After arguing the matter in 1986, we defeated the Thatcher Government and their proposals for total deregulation by a mere 14 votes. When they had a majority of 140, it was quite an achievement to defeat them by 14 votes.

I am sure that many people will complain about the fact that Sunday has become an ordinary day of the week. There is an opportunity for the House to limit at least some part of Sunday trading by restricting garden centres and DIY stores. I hope that those who are responsible for DIY stores will ensure that the six-hour restriction is maintained. If not, I hope that the Government and local authorities will ensure that heavy fines are imposed. I hope that all hon. Members will join me and my colleagues in voting down these Lords amendments.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): My contribution will be brief. Before their Lordships got their hands on the Bill, it had three main advantages which I would commend to the Government for inclusion in all future legislation: it was fair, simple and enforceable. It was easy for people to understand, it was fair to everyone and it was simple and enforceable for local authorities.

The position which their Lordships want to push forward in the amendment is to enable two groups of shops —garden centres and DIY stores, and in some cases shops which are both—to have extra hours on a Sunday because some of their customers cannot be bothered to get up early in the morning, or perhaps they want to continue gardening or DIY-ing late into the night.

If one goes round the DIY stores and garden centres on a Sunday, as I have done recently in my area, one will find that they sell such diverse things as furniture, carpets, sweets, food, newspapers, pets, pet food, car parts, bicycles, sports goods, sports shoes, video and music cassettes, crockery, electrical goods and a variety of other items. We are effectively saying that a DIY store or garden centre can sell those goods on Sundays when other shops will not be allowed to sell them and that cannot be fair.

Secondly, we are being asked to support an amendment that states:

"any shop which is a nursery, garden centre or do-it-yourself home improvement shop, or a combination of these, and where the trade or business carried on consists wholly or mainly of the sale of any one or more of the following".

I must declare an interest as I am a barrister and if this amendment is agreed it will create much work for me and my colleagues. Major DIY stores will spend a great deal of money on my colleagues sorting out in court what the phrase "consists wholly or mainly" means. So, in five years' time we will be back in the House reconsidering the Sunday trading legislation in the light of a host of anomalies. I remind the House that that is why we legislated on the matter in the first place.

The third question is that of enforceability. What will happen when local authorities check on DIY stores, such as Dixons, Currys or anyone who decides to start selling DIY or garden materials? What about a furniture store that starts to sell deck chairs? Is it "wholly or mainly" involved in plants, garden supplies and accessories, or is it a furniture store that has a subsidiary interest? Enforcement will become a minefield.

I strongly recommend that hon. Members stick with what the House decided, which was that we wanted a simple, enforceable and easily comprehensible solution.

Mr. Pike: It is very rare that I agree with the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), but I certainly do tonight and I strongly underline his comments.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), I have taken a different line from that in the Bill and from the compromise agreed during our earlier debates in the House. I did not believe that we should support the Shopping Hours Reform Council compromise, but ultimately it was carried. It got a majority in the House and, eventually, in the other place, but almost immediately an attempt was made to make a major breach in that compromise. Although I did not support it, one has to accept that the people who advocated it outlined certain principles—it could be easily understood and enforced and would not create fortunes for barristers interpreting exactly what it meant.

The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) got it completely wrong when she spoke of the status quo. Why should we talk about the status quo for certain people—people who in some cases have chosen to break the law for some considerable time? The House will know that I have said on many occasions that in this country we do not break the law if we want to change it. We believe in doing so through democratic means.

Mrs. Roe: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that garden centres were legally selling the items covered by the Shops Act 1950. I was referring to that fact when I mentioned the status quo.

Mr. Pike: I accept the hon. Lady's point, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore said, DIY stores were the first deliberately to challenge existing legislation by breaking it and they have been doing so for a long time. Then other stores, such as Sainsbury and Tesco, thought that if the DIY stores were getting away with it, why should they not challenge the law? Now this Bill is going through Parliament.

I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members hope that, whatever side we were on at an earlier stage, we will not have to debate the issue again next year or the year after. One would hope that the Bill will at least stand, be enforceable and be observed, despite my reservations.

I have strong reservations about whether some people will observe the six-hour limit. I have grave doubts whether Sainsbury or other stores will abide by that rule. Initially, they will do so, but I fear that in a few years' time they will break it. If we allow Lords amendment No. 9 to stand, we are asking for such stores to challenge and break the law because they will rightly be able to ask, "Why should others be able to get away with it, if we are not allowed to do so? Why should there be a difference and why are they put in an exclusive bracket?"

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore spoke ably on the DIY aspect. DIY shops will look closely at what they are selling and may well choose to include even more excluded products, as long as they still meet the criteria of "mainly". For the Bill to state "wholly or mainly" leaves the outcome wide open. Stores might well decide to sell other goods because the profit margins are better. They could change their stock to get around the law, if they are put in the privileged position that would result if we agreed to Lords amendment No. 9.

We accepted a compromise and it would be wrong for the House to accept the Lords amendment. We should reject it, because it is a serious breach of the principle that we agreed a few months ago and it would be wrong to breach that principle.

I genuinely believe that if we pass the amendment we will be asked in 12 months' time to put superstores such as Sainsbury and Tesco in the same bracket, and then some other store a year later. The result will be total deregulation and all that that means, which is what I feared was many people's ultimate objective.

People will be able to do the shopping that they want to do during the six-hour period on a Sunday between 10 am and 4 pm. If they want to go to Sainsbury, Tesco or whatever the store happens to be—perhaps Pioneer, the Co-op superstore in my constituency, which opens on a Sunday—or to do some gardening or DIY, most people will be able to ensure that they go to the garden centre or DIY store between 10 am and 4 pm. Those stores will not lose any money if the amendment is rejected. If the trade is there, they will get it. It will merely mean that people have to shop between 10 am and 6 pm. [HON. MEMBERS: "Four!"] I am sorry and thank my hon. Friends for correcting me; it was a slip of the tongue. People will be able to organise their day and ensure that they get the plants that they want to plant or the piece of furniture that they want to put together. That is perfectly reasonable and, therefore, we should reject the Lords amendment.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), who spoke for the Opposition, ended her speech with a reference to a letter that she had received from a group of stores or shops. In my brief contribution, I shall echo that precedent by referring to a letter that I received from my friend Stephen May, who is one of the directors of the John Lewis Partnership.

I have no interest to declare in that partnership, other than that of being a fairly regular customer, but my friend makes an important point in recording that the John Lewis Partnership was certainly not an advocate of the six-hour option, but heard the House's judgment that it wanted something clear and simple. Lords amendment No. 9 would wreck that clarity and simplicity. It abandons the simple distinction between deregulation for small shops and six hours' trading for large shops by allowing large DIY stores and large garden centres to trade when they like. It introduces what I feel is grossly unfair competition in respect of the huge volume of non-DIY or gardening goods which those types of outlets can sell.

7.30 pm

The simple point which I want to leave with my colleagues is the extent to which the competition is unfair, and this is not a trivial matter. The sales of non-DIY goods in DIY businesses are more than the sales of all merchandise sold in John Lewis department stores, Debenhams or Argos. It would mean that a washing machine could be sold by a Comet section within a B and Q, but not in a Currys, and a carpet could be sold in Texas, but not in a carpet store.

If amendment No. 9 stands, we shall be plunged back into anomalies, with shops pretending to be one thing when they are actually another and loopholes being exploited for commercial advantage. The law would be unclear as well as unfair, and clarity and fairness were certainly two of the major objectives which were secured and aimed at by the six-hour option that the House has adopted. I hope very much that the attempt to moderate, modify or change the

system with the clear and reasonably fair principle with which the Bill left the House will not now be undermined by the acceptance of the Lords amendment No. 9.

Mr. Couchman: I have listened carefully to the arguments from the hon. Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike), and for once I find myself in agreement with them.

It is worth offering to the House the view of the chairman of the Shopping Hours Reform Council, Baroness Jay. She believes that, as the proposers of the six-hour option, the council does not support any changes which threaten that compromise. The Bill as drafted achieved a successful and careful balance between the concerns of consumers, citizens and employees, and she states that that balance was difficult to construct.

While Baroness Jay believes that there may be room for some adjustments—I think she probably means the issues that were settled in the previous group of amendments—she states that the council cannot support exemptions that may damage its integrity and standing.

The six-hour option first saw the light of day in my name in a private Member's Bill which was introduced on the Order Paper on the same day as the Bill of the hon. Member for Ogmore. It is impossible for me to support amendment No. 9. I regret very much the fact that small garden centres in particular have found themselves tangled up in the amendment with the big do-it-yourself shops. I was under absolutely no doubt that the owners of the big do-it-yourself stores, recognising that total deregulation would not find favour with the House, were content to accept the six-hour option. I regret that we have been faced with this amendment at all, and I for one will seek to disagree with the Lords.

Question put, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 160, Noes 293.

Division No. 270] **[7.33 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baldry, Tony
Beresford, Sir Paul
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Boyes, Roland
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Graham
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Flynn, Paul
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fraser, John
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert
Hodge, Margaret
Horam, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Maxton, John
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Nicholas
Sproat, Iain
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Willetts, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Fabricant and
Mr. Michael Brown.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Ashton, Joe
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burns, Simon
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbett, Robin

Corbyn, Jeremy
Couchman, James
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Dunn, Bob
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Durant, Sir Anthony
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Forman, Nigel
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Sir Peter
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lightbown, David
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Oiner, William
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Patrick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stott, Roger
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tracey, Richard
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Alton and
Mr. Stuart Bell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Lords amendments Nos. 10 and 11 agreed to.

Amendment made to Lords amendment No. 12, to leave out '(ba) or (bb)' and insert 'or (ba)'—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Lords amendment No. 12, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 24 agreed to.

Schedule 4

RIGHTS OF SHOP WORKERS AS RESPECTS SUNDAY WORKING

Lords amendment: No. 25, in page 10, line 47, at end insert—

(" "catering business" means—

(a) the sale of meals, refreshments or intoxicating liquor for consumption on the premises on which they are sold, or

(b) the sale of meals or refreshments prepared to order for immediate consumption off the premises.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 26 to 43.

Mr. Ray Powell: On the amendments dealing with employment protection, it was emphasised in Committee and on the Floor of the House that not only would staff who were expected to work on Sundays be given an enhanced payment—we talked about double time—but fuller protection than is currently in the Bill. As we are reaching the final stage of the Bill, some of us are alarmed that no protection is given to the hundreds of thousands of shop workers who will be expected to work on Sundays.

Will the Government consider introducing some sort of amendments or statutory instrument so that employees compelled to work on Sundays will be given some protection? The least that those who have been demanding for years that shops be open on Sundays should do is give one of the most poorly paid group of workers in the country —shop workers—a decent wage when they give up their Sundays to provide a service to the shop and the country. The least that we can do is ask the House to consider that at the first opportunity, so that workers receive the enhanced payment promised to them when the Bill was in Committee and elsewhere.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 26 to 43 agreed to.

Ordered,

That a Committee be appointed to draw up a Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 9.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Ordered,

That Mr, James Arbuthnot, Dr. Liam Fox, Mr. Peter Lloyd, Mr. Alan Meale and Ms Joan Ruddock be members of the Committee.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Ordered,

That three be the quorum of the Committee.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Ordered,

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Reason for disagreeing to Lords amendment No. 9 reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

The International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Patnick:]*

7.53 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): In August this year, Britain will go to the United Nations to stand condemned in the dock of world opinion for its failure to protect and extend citizens' rights in this country.

What we are really debating here today is the United Kingdom's shunned responsibilities and the Conservatives' failure to meet their human rights obligations to British citizens. It is sad that fundamental political questions of serious concern such as rights and democracy are debated in the United Kingdom's Parliament only by the luck of an Adjournment debate, rather than being central to our concerns. I am afraid that it shows how detached Parliament as a whole, and the Conservative Government in particular, has become from people's basic concerns.

By sharp contrast, the next Labour Government will deliver a renewed and real commitment to defining and protecting the rights of the British people. We shall do so not only because we have signed international treaties but because of our core belief that people's rights should be protected and are intrinsic to a democratic country, and not only because the United Nations will be looking over our shoulder to monitor our human rights record, but because we truly value the human dignity that should be inherent in every citizen in the country.

That will be just one strand of the attack on the failures of our democracy which the next Labour Government will introduce in the new democratic settlement. A fundamental political divide even transcends political parties. It is the divide between those who believe in a pluralist system with many ways into our democracy and those who believe that only one track exists in our democracy and that whoever wins the general election and installs someone in 10 Downing street has the whole of political wisdom summed up in their character. That false premise becomes increasingly less sustainable as the present Government go on.

The positive aspect of this debate, however, is that that effort to build up sustainable human rights in the United Kingdom must be just one part of a wider change in our democracy to a plural democracy of independent, strong and legitimate local authorities, regional assemblies that count for something and have real powers, a second Chamber elected by the people and a House of Commons worthy of the name. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) here tonight as he has done much in the latter regard. He recently tried to put some flesh on the bones of the idea floated by the Prime Minister about improving Prime Minister's Question Time. As one of the outstanding parliamentarians of my intake, I hope that he gets all the success that he deserves.

In considering how rights affect the effort to build what John Smith called a new democratic settlement for a new century, we must first look at incorporating into British law the European convention on human rights and then seek to build up a knowledge and awareness of individual rights and responsibilities among the British people so that never again will people feel powerless and defenceless whenever

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a central Government use their overbearing powers to slice away at individual liberties. That has patently taken place over the past 16 years and was also evident in the centralising tendencies of previous Governments. We should all have a little humility in that regard because Governments of all political colours have abused the overbearing power of the Executive to centralise power. In a society with no written checks or balances, little stands in the way of the central machine once it gets under way. Introducing those checks and balances—those impediments to arbitrary Executive power—must be one of the foremost tasks of the incoming Labour Government.

As I have said previously in the Chamber, I do not believe that written rights are a panacea for all the ills in our political society—far from it—but I firmly believe that the writing down of rights for everyone to see provides a framework in which the ordinary individual, even the schoolchild, can operate. Those constraints on executive power which should be in place can then be better understood by the average individual and not be the subject of judicial archaeology to discover an individual's specific rights.

It is therefore important that we move rapidly towards written rights for individuals and citizens in this country, and there is no better starting point than the internationally agreed texts on human rights. The clearest and most widely respected text is the international covenant for civil and political rights. In effect, it is an international bill of rights, put together by the United Nations and agreed by the nations of the world. It is a measure against which our human rights record should be studied.

As a signatory to the international covenant for civil and political rights, the United Kingdom has wittingly and willingly agreed to uphold the citizens' rights set down in its 27 articles, to adopt new legislation where necessary, to effect those rights fully and to ensure that anyone whose rights are violated has an effective remedy. Every five years, the Government must submit an account of their rights record and report on their progress in introducing legislation to effect rights. That report must be submitted to the United Nations human rights committee, which then examines it. In its most recent response to the United Kingdom's report in 1991, the committee expressed concern about the Conservative record on a wide variety of rights issues. Many of those issues remain unaddressed today: the lack of judicial process in respect of emergency measures in Northern Ireland; inadequate legal aid provision; the treatment of asylum seekers and discrimination in the application of immigration laws; restrictions on freedom of information and excessive censorship.

That statement has been submitted not by Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, nor by one of the groups on the libertarian wing of civil rights, but by a sober and responsible organisation affiliated to the United Nations which treads very carefully before issuing statements in respect of the human rights record of any country and which therefore must be taken more seriously than any easy party political point scoring that might take place in this Chamber.

As a nation, by ratifying the international covenant for civil and political rights we have officially recognised that:

"the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

The failure of the Conservative Government to uphold in practice those equal and inalienable rights has contributed to the steady erosion of freedom, justice and peace in this country in the past 15 years. I shall seek to highlight those failures in the submission that I intend to make to the United Nations human rights committee next month.

We have signed and agreed that all peoples have the right of self-determination and that

"by virtue of that right they may freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development".

Have the peoples of the United Kingdom been given that choice? Do the Government respect that fundamental right? I suggest that we consult the Scottish people for an answer to that question. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West may have a similar view to express for Wales, but the Scottish people have consistently voted and expressed their desire through opinion polls for some type of devolution. That has been made transparent at the ballot box, in the opinion polls, in surveys and in conversation. It is in the atmosphere that those people want further self-determination and no one can deny that. In 1979, a majority of Scots voted directly for the creation of a Scottish Assembly, yet the Conservative Government have refused to respect their desire for a new political status. Similar considerations apply in Wales, where the rights of the Welsh people have been neglected.

The Labour party is committed to upholding the right of self-determination of peoples by creating a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. The realisation of that fundamental right found in the UN's covenant is long overdue in its application to our country.

I am sure that we would all say that we believed in the principles of justice and fairness. The international covenant for civil and political rights entrenches those principles. It states that everyone should be guaranteed the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence. It states those things baldly and clearly for all to see. There is no need to go back to the 17th century to read the obscure Habeas Corpus Act 1679 or even further back, to the 13th century, to read Magna Carta. It is there in plain language for every individual citizen to read in the covenant.

The covenent says that all persons must be afforded effective protection of the law, without discrimination. It states that a trial must take place without undue delay. It obliges Governments to provide legal assistance to anyone charged with a criminal offence who does not have the means to pay for it. It also obliges Governments to ensure that anyone charged with a criminal offence is informed promptly, in a language that he understands, of the nature and cause of the charge, and that that person is given adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence, including the free assistance of an interpreter if necessary, and is not compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt. It also obliges Governments to ensure that everyone who is convicted of a crime has the right to review by a higher tribunal.

Many people would say that such rights prevail in the United Kingdom under common law, but that is insufficient. That is not in itself adequate to protect the individual's rights, to make us aware of our individual rights and to enable us to understand them. Without that

understanding, those rights become meaningless to the individual unless he is accompanied by a learned lawyer or some other assistant to his rights.

I do not believe that we should require assistance to meet our rights. Those rights should be plain for all to see and for all to understand. Again I use as my benchmark the youngster at school who should grow up knowing in plain language where he or she stands on some of the fundamentals. That is the beauty of the incorporation into British law of the European convention on human rights, which states clearly the basic rights to freedom of speech, freedom of worship and privacy.

Once one grows up with the knowledge of those things, they stay with one for ever and one is prepared to defend them for ever. They are not something gifted to one by an obscure legal judgment. They belong to one and they cannot be taken away from one. Once one knows one's rights, it is far easier to understand one's responsibilities and social obligations. It is far easier for a teacher at school to explain to a child, "Yes, you know that you have the freedom of speech, but rights overlap." There are difficulties with some rights. A person's right to freedom of speech does not mean the liberty to shout "Fire" in a crowded cinema, as the famous American case showed. With such debate and exchange, our young people will genuinely become citizens rather than subjects in our society—something that I hope all hon. Members would welcome.

The European convention on human rights is not that frightening, even for Conservative Members. It has existed in its current form since 1951 and everyone has been able to take it into account in moulding the development of law in the United Kingdom. I may sometimes be critical of the judiciary, but in many respects it is ahead of the politicians, and the subject under discussion is one of those respects. Many of the senior judiciary realise that the precedents set in European law, particularly rights law, are being drawn into British common law, even without the European convention on human rights being formally incorporated into British law. It is happening by stealth. Why can we not incorporate the European convention clearly, openly and honestly and begin the wider process of education?

We take for granted many rights that one would have to struggle hard to find in written form. I have already mentioned some of them. While we search for those rights which may prevail in the United Kingdom there are undoubtedly many areas of concern in the law in respect of human rights. The judiciary is still largely unrepresentative of the population. I make no case for a proportion of judges to be women or to be from an ethnic minority, to be black or to be white, but it is wrong that a mere handful of the senior judiciary are currently women and it is wrong that only two or three are from what may be categorised as ethnic minorities or are black.

I commend the work of the Lord Chancellor, but the judiciary must become more representative if its members are to reflect and find acceptance within our society as arbiters of law and rights. I wish the Lord Chancellor well in his efforts towards that end, but I believe that further effort is required. Proposals will be forthcoming from the next Labour Government to ensure that a more balanced judiciary is in place by the end of the first term of the Labour Government.

The miscarriages of justice have been plain for all to see in the trials and media coverage. Criminal trials all too often suffer undue delay. Justice delayed is justice denied, which is not acceptable in modern society. Black and ethnic minorities, people with mental health problems, those already incarcerated and women suffer discrimination within our judicial system. Without a requirement in court to refer to legislated, written rights and with a barely discernible commitment to upholding the rights in the covenant, people up and down the country are subject to wrongful searches, arrests, detentions, convictions and imprisonment. That is not the way to ensure that citizens in this country support the judicial process and the hard-working police we are so lucky to have in this country. It is the way to undermine those institutions rather than strengthen them. I believe that written rights would help to strengthen those very forces of law and order now so ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

The legal aid system in this country is shameful. The Government have directly violated the right to free legal assistance for those who need it. The United Nations human rights committee stated in 1991—the last time that the Government had to report to the United Nations—that legal aid provisions in the United Kingdom were "excessively restricted". Those are not my words, but the words of the United Nations. The Conservatives have not only ignored that criticism, but have now placed the right to justice of the vulnerable and the poor in even greater jeopardy by legislating in April last year to reduce legal aid eligibility still further. Even more people are now being denied access to the courts where their cases can be dealt with openly and honestly.

The right to remain innocent until proved guilty is another basic human right and a fundamental tenet of our justice system. Not only has the proposed erosion of that right in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill been criticised by lawyers, pressure groups and politicians of all parties, but it is clearly in breach of our obligation under international law to guarantee a fair trial as defined in the international covenant for civil and political rights.

The European Commission of Human Rights has already ruled that the removal of the right to silence in Northern Ireland under the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 should be considered by the European Court. It is not good enough for our country to be periodically dragged into the courts, whether it is at the European level or whether it has to come before the United Nations every five years or so as the naughty boy of the international democratic community, unable to live up to international obligations that it helped to draft. The Government's school report states, "Must do better".

We in the Labour party recognise that there is a balance to be struck between convicting the guilty and ensuring that the innocent are not convicted. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield has made many proposals aimed at speeding up the conviction of the guilty, early intervention in the case of young offenders and other steps to reduce crime and protect the victims of crime. The rights of innocent people must be protected. We must ensure that suspects are not exposed to misleading questions which may result in false confessions and grave injustice. I shall not delay the House by rattling off the list of cases in which individuals have wrongly convicted themselves out of their own mouths as a result of such questioning. Those sad cases are known to all of us in this place.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill does not confine its proposed rights violations to an erosion of the right to silence. It threatens the lifestyles of minority

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cultures and will jeopardise the right to free movement and peaceful assembly. What sort of democracy can we claim to be when we are denied the right of assembly and peaceful protest? Those rights are enshrined in the covenant, so the Government are obliged to adhere to them. The covenant is not a voluntary process, but something written in international law to which the Government have voluntarily subscribed. It is not a menu from which they can take what they like and leave the rest. The Government are once again absolving themselves of their responsibility to adhere to the convention, much to the detriment of the rights and lives of United Kingdom citizens.

Under the international covenant for civil and political rights, we are also entitled to liberty and security. We must be protected from arbitrary arrest or detention and be accorded the due process of law. The right of freedom of association, which includes the right to form and join trade unions, is also enshrined in the covenant. The denial of trade union membership to employees at GCHQ is a disgrace and a grave violation of those rights. That, too, will be put right urgently and quickly by an incoming Labour Government after the next general election.

As immigration spokesperson for the Labour party, I am constantly confronted by violations of the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers. For example, the right of aliens to have an expulsion decision review is specifically and clearly stated in the international covenant for civil and political rights, but the Government breached their obligation to that right by passing the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993.

The Act removed the right of appeal against refusal of both entry clearance and leave to enter from visitors and students intending to study for less than six months and from prospective students and their dependants. It amounted to a removal of redress from about 25 per cent. of applicants. Many thousands of people who had appealed previously, had their appeals upheld and, therefore, could visit friends and family in this country found themselves without the right of appeal and denied the ability to test the decisions of the Home Office and the Government. It has compounded the existing problems of discrimination and disadvantages suffered by individuals from non-white countries that the Conservatives have failed to address.

Asylum seekers are not only detained en masse without trial, but are kept in difficult conditions, often for many months. It is in breach of the Government's obligations not to deprive anyone of his liberty

"except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as established by law"

and to treat all persons that are deprived of their liberty "with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person".

Can the conditions at Campsfield detention centre, where detainees are driven to go on hunger strike, be considered humane or dignified? How can the death of Omasese Lumumba, who died in Pentonville prison, where he was forcibly detained awaiting an asylum decision, be justified?

Prisoners are also denied the humanity and respect that is their right. Many prisons in the United Kingdom are overcrowded, with low standards of health care and sanitation, and problems such as drug taking are on the increase.

The international covenant for civil and political rights states that the essential aim of the penitentiary system should be the reformation and the social rehabilitation of prisoners. The United Nations human rights committee stressed the importance of that in its last report on the United Kingdom, yet prisoners in this country are offered little or no attempt at rehabilitation. Training and education facilities are limited, access to counselling and psychotherapy is denied to most prisoners and the use of solitary confinement continues.

Why does the Conservative political agenda appear to favour the imprisonment of as many people as possible? Their philosophy of prison works, as outlined by the Home Secretary's speech to the rabid Conservative conference last year, which proclaimed just that. It also proclaimed objectives such as locking up 12 to 14-year-olds and making community sentences "a proper punishment" with no regard to rehabilitation. That will serve to violate and not protect the rights which are bound in the UN convention.

I feel strongly that the best answer to the crime problem in Britain, particularly where it affects young people, is to give those young people a job; to give them some hope and some future. Then they will find less time to do the damage they so often do when denied that hope and that future by being denied a job.

There is not even an effective means of redress for prisoners whose rights have been violated, although the international covenant for civil and political rights clearly states that there must be such a remedy. We should have a prison complaints system that is independent and representative and full legal rights to representation and appeal.

Along with other citizens, prisoners must have their rights safeguarded in a civilised society and we shall follow closely the appointment and activities of the prison ombudsman to see whether he lives up to the benchmarks set by the United Nations.

It is fundamental to the international covenant for civil and political rights that the rights it serves to protect are accorded to all citizens equally and without distinction, yet the Conservative Government have continued to preside over institutions and to implement procedures which are clearly in breach of the convention's non-discrimination articles.

The Government have continued to ignore the unequal position of women in many spheres of economic and social life in the United Kingdom and have even refused to implement many of the recommendations put forward by their own independent watchdog, the Equal Opportunities Commission, when it has suggested anything approaching a radical overhaul of sex equality legislation.

The rights of ethnic minorities are also negotiated and the Commission for Racial Equality cites continuing evidence of widespread discrimination on racial grounds.

It was with some regret that I read the Home Secretary's comments in the recent European election raising fears of mass immigration from eastern Europe, raising the spectre to frighten people here by saying that millions of people would come into the United Kingdom from central and eastern Europe, and, indeed, telling some untruths in respect of the policies of my own party.

It really sits ill with such a person to pose as the friend of the ethnic minority communities, seeking to ensure racial harmony while stoking the very fires of prejudice and discrimination that so afflict our country. That was as

deeply disappointing as his failure to condemn the *Mail on Sunday* for its distortion of the story relating to those Jamaicans who came to Britain at Christmas time and its statement that those people had vanished.

The Home Secretary knows as well as anyone else that by the same definition millions of British tourists vanish at any one time because people are not counted in and counted out of nations when they go on holiday. It was a ludicrous story for the *Mail on Sunday* to run and it was even more offensive that the Home Secretary could not find it in himself publicly to state his condemnation of the way in which that front page story was run in order to incite individuals to a wrong perception of the situation concerning immigrants or visitors from Jamaica.

It was really not good enough to come forward with a less than adequate statement on racial harassment and minor changes to the law on racial harassment when we all know that the race card will be played at election time, as it was played in the European elections and the last general election and as it will be played in the next general election.

Quite frankly, I hope that the Home Secretary, not least because of his own family background—I do not wish to linger on that, but I understand that he came from a family of immigrants and has made much of himself from that background and I welcome the fact that he has done that —should consider the fortunes of those setting out on the same path. To feed prejudice and the poison of discrimination does no credit to him or his office.

Under the international covenant for civil and political rights we are entitled to privacy and the Conservative Government have made a mockery of that right. Infringements of individual privacy by the state and large corporations are now rife, let alone the bugging and the use of long range lenses to pry into the lives of individuals by the media.

Surveillance and bugging have become more prevalent, and employees complain of intrusive monitoring of their personal lives in the work place. There is even talk of introducing identity cards—but to imagine that such cards will have a serious impact on crime is to delude oneself. I fear that the Prime Minister is snatching at another of the one-off ideas that he comes up with sometimes, such as boot camps. They will have no effect whatever on hardened criminals such as drug dealers, and others who can easily obtain access to false identity cards. That happens throughout Europe, and the introduction of identity cards will not influence such people by one iota.

Press regulation is inadequate, and the press complaints body is unrepresentative. The need for a formal privacy law can no longer be ignored. Even the Government's own consultation paper "Infringements of Privacy" admitted that the law does not protect people adequately from harassment. Opposition Members recognise the need to balance the right to privacy with rights to freedom of information and expression. We require not only the introduction of privacy laws but a freedom of information Act, "right to reply" legislation and a free press.

For too long we have drifted away from fundamental principles of open government and free information towards censorship, excessive secrecy and unaccountability in government. Those developments are not the product of any personal defects in Conservative Members; they are a logical extension of centralised power in this country, which is unchecked and unchallenged, with no one item able to stand in the way of the will or whim of members of the Executive. That, rather than the inadequacies of this or that political personality, is the fundamental fault in our political system.

At present, we do not even have minimal legislation on freedom of information. The Conservatives have not only held but withheld information as they have seen fit. Even the citizens charter allows public authorities to keep basic consumer information secret from the public. Sometimes the Conservatives give us a glimpse of commitment to upholding their human rights obligations; in this instance, they have promised to release information on request under a new code of practice on access to Government information. It is a bit surprising that the effect of the code will be limited in practice: unlike a freedom of information Act, it is not actually enforceable. Rather than having access to documents, we shall be given only selective answers to questions. Even then, information on immigration, nationality and refugee policy will be exempt —and the Conservatives are planning to charge for the information.

The same circumstances apply to so many of our rights. Legislation for rights protection may be in place, but that is not enough to ensure that our rights are made effective in practice. The Government do not merely have an obligation to legislate; they have a responsibility to make good their rights protections. A pertinent example is the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs. That right is essential if we are to have a representative and accountable Government, and maintain a sense of citizenship that has faded steadily over the past 15 years.

Little wonder that there is a pervasive feeling of alienation from the institutions of politics; little wonder that there is a low turnout in our council and European elections—and, in my view, an unacceptably low turnout in our parliamentary elections. Little wonder that there is a deep, genuine and growing contempt, if not for this place, for some of the people in it and for antics that the public perceive as irrelevant and unimportant—antics that we get up to when there are matters of great import to be discussed.

We in this place have a necessary duty to correct that problem. I believe that we must ensure that our procedures are brought up to date—not in a dry technical sense, but as an important, indeed central, part of our democracy. In an electronic age, people at home should feel that they share our beliefs and respect our opinions, rather than seeing what we do as a form of the cult comedy that so often appears on our screens.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Speeding up our procedures involves a difficulty: it often means that opportunities for Back Benchers are wiped out. For instance, the second Adjournment debate used to be an acceptable part of House of Commons procedure, but is now exceedingly difficult to secure. Tonight is an example of that. I am in no way criticising my hon. Friend, but I warn him that modernising our procedures often means fewer opportunities for Back Benchers who may want to put urgent points of view on awkward subjects.

Mr. Allen: I have great respect for my hon. Friend's views in that respect, and in particular for the doughty fight that he, as a legislator, has carried out against the Executive. I think that many newer and younger Members of Parliament pride themselves on emulating, in their own way, his efforts to perform that task.

[Mr. Allen]

I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that the Executive now has powers that would make Stalin salivate. The Prime Minister, in 10 Downing street, has the ability to appoint senior judiciary and every member of the Cabinet —the senior Executive; he has the ability to appoint Members to the second Chamber, should that ever be necessary. If 1,000 Members in the other place were to perish and the majority was not there for the Conservative party, the Prime Minister could appoint additional Members, unencumbered by a bill of rights or a written constitution.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) thinks long and hard about these matters. He may agree that one of the central problems of this place is the fact that the legislature is not an independent body but, to all intents and purposes, the creature of the Executive. It is almost possible to use an analogy that was used the other day, involving the film "Alien": within the legislation is the enormous parasitical body of the Executive, controlling its every movement. I am waiting to see it burst out from the Minister at some point in the near future.

I consider the control exercised by the Executive to be the enemy of democracy. The only answer is to develop a pluralist democracy of many institutions, each with its own legitimacy and power, that can confront and conflict with the Executive on the road to consensus. I think that the Executive has often allowed Back Benchers the few crumbs of power that they have in order to disguise the fundamental inadequacy of this place in holding the Executive to account.

The international covenant for civil and political rights guarantees everyone the right and opportunity to participate in the conduct of public affairs, to vote or be elected and to have equal access to public service. In 1994, we still have massive over-centralisation and restricted access to the opportunities that I have cited. Central Government refuse to devolve power to the nations and regions. Again, I make no passing party-political point; Governments of all descriptions have always tended towards centralisation because they have been unencumbered and unrestricted by written rights and constitutional developments, and local democracy has been classically undermined over the past 16 years.

I often wonder why many of my hard-working colleagues in local government stand for election. They do a vital and tremendous job, but they no longer have influence or control over budgets. Many members of the Conservative, Labour and other parties now choose not to enter local politics and serve their community because they feel that it would be useless to do so in the face of the Executive power that is being used against them. Many people take great pride in being able to make small local achievements, but their right and ability to do so is being denied by the Government's massive centralisation drive, which conflicts with one of the basic tenets of civil and political rights in the international covenant.

Mr. Dalyell: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the first objectives of a Labour Government should be to restore dignity to local government?

Mr. Allen: I feel strongly that local government should be given some form of genuine independence from the centre. How that should be achieved—by using the Parliament Act 1911, by defining its financial abilities and by making clear its power—will require wide discussion and probably some genuine consensus in the House.

We must listen to the voices outside and must give them power and let 1,000 flowers bloom, even though from our point of view some may be weeds. It is important to hear people and ensure those developments. In that way lies economic recovery. The great personal strength of the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher—using the centralised machine to its nth degree—has proved one thing to all of us: that centralisation can no longer deliver economically. It was tried with its best driver but failed. The answer to our economic ills lies in a far wider effort, involving independent local communities, individuals with rights and the ability to define their own futures and with the regions and nations of the United Kingdom operating together.

I do not believe that our economic salvation lies with centralisation. It will be guaranteed, as it is in many of our leading competitor countries, only by those who seek to devolve energy and power and give people their head to innovate and be entrepreneurial. The way that the Government are going, running counter to the international covenant on civil and political rights, is the wrong way to go—more and more centralisation will mean that we are less and less effective.

One of the classic examples is the plethora of unelected quangos. Billions of pounds of public money is dispensed without account or clearly defined lines of scrutiny to elected representatives. Our public services, having been in the hands, first, of locally-elected representatives and then nationally-elected representatives, are now increasingly in unelected hands.

Membership of Parliament, for example, is not open to all, most starkly because the hereditary principle still operates in half of our legislature but also because the unsociable hours of Parliament and the lack of child care facilities prevent those with family responsibilities from participating in government. Black and ethnic minorities remain under-represented. An incoming Government must, above all, make it clear that as part of a new democratic settlement—a new pluralist settlement—we shall redeem our historic pledge to have an elected second Chamber and abolish the House of Lords in its current form. That, too, ties in with the international covenant on civil and political rights by ensuring that people are drawn into public affairs.

It is nonsense that the vast majority of those who sit in our second Chamber are hereditary peers. That is becoming less and less tenable in this day and age. As I read in the newspaper the other day, what a farce we would say it was if the second Chamber in Germany, instead of being made up of regional representatives, were made up of relatives of the former Kaiser or Bismarck or that the second Chamber in Russia were made up of relatives and descendants of Lenin, Stalin or even the Tsars.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East, before his sad death, felt vehemently that the hereditary peerage should be dispensed with quickly and that we should have proper elections to the second Chamber. Nothing less would be acceptable under a new Labour Government.

Hon. Members, too, have no reason to be complacent for the reasons that I outlined earlier, with the assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. This place needs to rediscover some teeth in terms of the way in which

it scrutinises legislation. Pre-legislative scrutiny is very important. The Special Standing Committees that have been in abeyance for many years need to be resurrected in some form. We must strengthen departmental Select Committees so they can report to the Floor. Since 1979, there have been 500 departmental Select Committee reports, many of them first rate, but only four have been voted on on the Floor of the House. What other organisation that any Member is connected with establishes a committee to do a job and refuses to receive its report? What nonsense.

We must make some fundamental changes before we shall be seen to be fit to challenge the Executive. That Executive may be a Labour Executive. That is one of the reasons why resisting the temptation to shape reform needs the inoculation of clear, open public commitments well ahead of a general election.

The formal political process must be opened up to ensure broader representation of people, nationally and locally. We need a diversity of institutions—that is the definition of pluralism and is contrary to our unitary system—that are elected, accountable and, above all, independent of central Government, so that none of them is the creature of central Government and the Executive.

We also require a plurality of electoral systems. I do not make a case for any particular electoral system, nor do I make a case for change in the first Chamber, but one of the things that I learned from two years hard labour on Lord Plant's commission into electoral systems is that there is no holy grail, no perfect electoral system. It is a matter of political judgment, and the judgment of my party, endorsed at its annual conference last year, is that there should be a regional list system of proportional representation for the European Parliament. It seems perfectly suited to that. That means that last week's election was the last election under first past the post and we will move on to a different system under a new Government. That should be welcomed by the Conservative party, since such a system would have meant that the disaster that they suffered would have been slightly mitigated.

However, as a democrat I accept that there are swings and roundabouts, and that a mid-term Labour Government might find themselves the beneficiaries, by losing fewer seats than otherwise might have been the case.

Secondly, the Labour party conference proposed that the second Chamber should be elected by a similar proportional representation system, using a regional list. Finally, the conference said that there should be a referendum, and that the people should decide on the electoral system to be used for this place, although there was a preference for single-Member constituencies.

Those three pledges were not merely made by our national executive committee and our party conference, but were agreed by our former leader. Of all the people in my party, John Smith had the greatest gut instinct for democracy—perhaps because of his Scottish background, perhaps because of his devolution experience. He may have been a hard man to convince, but when he was convinced on a matter of democracy, he stuck with it in the strongest possible fashion—as I know well with regard to his deep personal commitment to a bill of rights, to incorporate the European convention on human rights. It is nothing less than a personal task to ensure that those commitments are carried through in his absence, as he would have wanted.

We must encourage greater participation in our democracy, if it is to be worthy of the name. We can do that by more than one-off participation once every four or five years at a general election; we should have lots of strings to our bow. We should have meaningful local elections and develop regional assemblies from the bottom up. They should not be imposed from the centre and thus be immediately repealable following a change of Government; they should be regions that people want, care for and build themselves. Devising those institutions, and ensuring that people feel that they own them, will be an important task.

We should also have a judiciary that is more representative of and less distant from those whom it seeks to serve. We should have a European Parliament that defines its powers. Let us take the word subsidiarity at its face value, decide what should be done at the European level and define clearly what the powers of the nation state should be. In those contexts, backed up by the fact that individuals would know their rights, individuals would genuinely and meaningfully be able to participate at many levels in our democracy. That is a great cause, well worth working for in the next Labour Government.

But that is for the next Labour Government, and here we are now with a Government who seem to have no desire whatever for any restraint to be placed upon their activities in the name of democracy, or of human rights or citizens' rights. An unrestrained executive power has allowed the Conservatives to pursue policies and introduce legislation that undermines human rights in many spheres. The result is a disillusioned populace, withdrawn from politics and lacking any real sense of citizenship and civic responsibilities. Participatory democracy has been stifled in this country.

One of the key areas that we must examine to ensure that the international covenant for civil and political rights is made meaningful is the use and abuse of prerogative powers—the ability of a Government of any political party to take the nation into a war without any redress, and without even informing the House. The House debates matters long after the event, and then only because a motion is contrived to allow Members to have their say. Obviously, I do not say that the Executive should be prevented from taking the necessary action at a time of national emergency, but at the earliest reasonable opportunity that action should be ratified by the legislature —the people who represent the electorate.

Mr. Dalyell: Does my hon. Friend recall that the House of Commons was in no way consulted about the decision to allow bombers to go from Upper Heyford and other British bases to attack Libya, and that there was no formal permission for the Gulf war? Those and many other factors mean that it ill becomes us to criticise the Americans too much about the Gulf of Tonkin.

Mr. Allen: The same could be said of Kuwait as of Libya—and also of the Falklands conflict, in which actions were taken and only later, on a procedural technicality, was the elected House of Commons involved.

Prerogative powers also extend to such activities as the appointment of the judiciary. How interesting it was to see the hearings concerning Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas in the United States Congress, at the same time as in this country two judges of the Court of Appeal were appointed without any reference whatever to the legislature. I do not

[Mr. Allen]

say that we should put our judiciary through the mill as Clarence Thomas was put through the mill, but there is a happy medium. Those individuals should at least have their appointments noted by the House.

To have a Legal Affairs Select Committee—the only part in the St. John-Stevas jigsaw still missing from 1979—would be progress. The possibility of having a Secretary of State for Justice, answerable at the Dispatch Box, rather than having a Lord Chancellor in the other place, would be progress, too.

Certainly we should understand how the individuals concerned come to be appointed. I shall digress briefly with one anecdote. The father of a friend of mine was to be appointed to a senior post in the judiciary, and when he went along for his interview the whole process, which lasted 40 minutes, consisted of a discussion of how the cricket team was doing at his old public school. He then left the interview and was told by letter the following day that he had got the job.

There may be some exaggeration in my friend's story—I do not know—but it is difficult to discover the criteria used in individual appointments. It would be healthy for our democracy if, even if only nominally, such senior people were to come before the House or one of its committees to take up their posts and be given their duties legitimately by the legislature. I go no further than that. The present process undermines the credibility of the judiciary, and mystery does not add to that credibility in this modern age—the information age.

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of a Secretary of State for Justice, when I was first elected here some 32 years ago, the whole place was hoatching with Queen's counsel on both sides. Both parties will soon be hard put to it to find QCs to occupy the positions of Attorney-General and Solicitor-General. It is becoming a problem for the Conservative party and it is certainly a problem for the Opposition. In those circumstances, the idea of having an Attorney-General becomes that much more difficult. We Scots have seen this because we cannot have direct questioning of the Lord-Advocate, who is our equivalent of the Attorney-General. With a case such as Lockerbie, there can be extremely serious consequences.

Mr. Allen: That is a genuine difficulty in respect of the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General. Where I would draw the line would be that if the Lord Chancellor was accountable to this place, and if we genuinely had a Secretary of State for Justice, there would be no reason for that individual to have as a requirement a legal qualification, any more than we would expect the Secretary of State for Health to be a legally qualified doctor. It might be better if a Secretary of State for Justice, encountering the fundamental political problems and administrative problems that beset our legal system and our judiciary, was a person without legal qualifications.

In terms of prerogative powers, there must be in principle one general rule—that in this day and age, any power exercised by the Executive should have legislative authority. Again, I am not saying that that would alter the way in which the power was used. However, let it be transparent and let it be on the face of a Bill that the Government—the Executive—have the power to take the country into war, on the condition that at the earliest possible moment the House should be informed and allowed to debate the matter.

Let it be on the face of a Bill that the judiciary should be appointed in the following way. Let it be on the face of a Bill that instead of treaties being covered by some obscure rule from the 1920s, they shall be ratified by this place if they involve international obligations. Again, perhaps, there is no need for a change in the way in which power is exercised, but essentially there is a need for a change in the way in which power is held to account. That needs to be made very clear in this place.

Mr. Dalyell: I intrude on my hon. Friend's generosity, once again, to support him. It is not simply a matter of not formally debating military action before it happens. I have experience, as do some of my colleagues, of pleading with Speakers when ominous situations were developing to allow private notice questions so that something could be done before the event about what seemed to be important issues. But we are told that the situation is hypothetical and that we are not entitled to a private notice question. In those circumstances, it is a case of not being able to take action until the milk is spilt. That is deeply unsatisfactory, democratically and constitutionally.

Mr. Allen: As usual, my hon. Friend finds the most knotty and difficult points of principle in my general case. I would be extremely cautious before saying that the Executive power itself could not be used as and where it was seen to be appropriate. However, I underline the principle that the legislature should then be able to scrutinise and hold to account the Executive in their actions. My hon. Friend may agree that that would be the only sensible way in which to proceed.

We do not seek to hamstring the Executive. On the contrary, as many years' membership of the Public Accounts Committee has taught me, an effective legislature is a boon and a bonus to an Executive, unless it becomes deadlocked or gridlocked by the political problems that have beset the Executive in the United States. If it does not, it is of great assistance, not only in terms of value for money, in which the Public Accounts Committee revels, but in terms of good government. Some of the most appalling mistakes made by Government would have been checked if we had had an effective legislature.

The poll tax is but one example. I led for my party, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), who was with us earlier, on the Child Support Bill. My word, the Government must now wish that they had listened at that point, a year before the Bill became an Act. Would not they now give their eye teeth for a pre-legislative stage? They could then have listened to the fathers, the mothers and the children who could have told them about some of the nonsense that would emerge through the Child Support Act 1991. But we failed. The House failed in its duty of holding the Executive to account. Since we failed, literally thousands of people have suffered, many of them children.

That is but one example. Hon. Members who have served on other Bills can tell the House from their own experience of how in education, or in immigration or other areas, the failure to provide proper legislative scrutiny has left a legacy, which is inherited by the schools, by the people seeking a visitor's visa, and by other individuals

affected by our legislation. We are not yet competent and professional enough in the way in which we scrutinise the Executive and their legislation. Clearly, that has to be put right, or we may, even then, be in breach of our commitments under the international convention on civil and political rights.

The Opposition do not want prerogative powers and Executive powers done away with, but they should be held to account by the appropriate body, in a political philosophy which goes back 200 years through a separation of powers and all the other key democratic pillars to which many of us pay lip service. We want those powers held to account by the legislature and checked, at one remove, by an independent judiciary. That is the basis of any democracy. We do not have that basis in this country and we do not have it in this place. We want to see the Government of the United Kingdom revitalised, with renewed trust in their practice and institutions and revived participation on the part of all their citizens. We want to see citizens as shareholders in our democracy. The responsibility lies with Government and, if this Government will not take it, that responsibility, abdicated by the Conservatives, will be picked up and welcomed by an incoming Labour Government.

The international covenant on civil and political rights sounds technical, it sounds dry, it does not look very sexy on the Order Paper, but all of us in the House would do well to put on our walls as part of our job description what it says in the following respect:

"the ideal of free human beings, enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his or her economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights".

That is not a bad job description for a Member of Parliament and it is one which we should take very seriously. Central to that will be the need to improve the UK system of checks and balances, so that the Executive may be held to account, as I have outlined, and a new, pluralist constitutional settlement based on those principles of subsidiarity and openness and entrenched rights in law.

I have said that we are committed to incorporating into British law the European convention on human rights. We are also committed to establishing an all-party commission, which will devise a British bill of rights and bring that bill back to this place in a matter of years, perhaps two years, after the first incorporation has taken place. That will give individuals the right to challenge arbitrary decisions and excesses of powers that affect them and to guarantee a quality of treatment without discrimination. Those of us who are interested in that area—all of us should be—follow the proposals emanating from Northern Ireland at the moment about the possible consensus that could arise around a bill of rights in that part of the United Kingdom. There is much of importance for the other people of the United Kingdom in that, as well as for the people in the Northern Irish part of the United Kingdom and I wish those who are involved the very best in producing something that may have something to teach the rest of us about making sure that human rights are respected throughout the kingdom.

Statute law will be used, and must be used, to correct the specific rights problems which are not always captured by the generality of rights legislation. Our new constitution will comprise that rights legislation, the election of a second Chamber, an examination of our electoral systems and referenda on the system to be used by the first Chamber, English regional assemblies, a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly, a reformed judiciary to which I have alluded, and independent local government.

Very soon, our country will undergo the humiliation of having the Conservatives defend their rights record before the United Nations. Shortly thereafter, the UN human rights committee will issue its response, which, as the last one did, will inevitably highlight the deficiencies of the human rights record of the Conservative Government. Let this be the last time that our record is a source of shame for our country. Let a new Government, a Labour Government, build a nation aware of its rights and secure in their defence.

9.10 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On 4 November 1839, in my constituency, 20 men were killed, one of whom was George Shell, a cabinet maker from Pontypool. The night before he died, he sent a message to his parents saying, "If I die tomorrow, I will die in a noble cause." That noble cause was the same noble cause about which my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has spoken tonight. It was the cause of democracy and human rights.

George Shell was one of the Chartists to be shot down in front of the Westgate hotel in Newport. The Chartists campaigned against all the crude injustices and unfairness of the embryonic and very wretched democracy that existed at that time. Over the years, our democracy has improved. All but one of those Chartists' rights have been achieved. We have got rid of uneven sized constituencies. The property right has been abolished and the franchise is now universal.

However, one of the Chartists' claims has never been achieved. As each year passes, that other point of the charter which they carried on their banners becomes more appropriate. That point was annual parliaments. I am not suggesting that we should head in that direction, but the position that we are in now is highlighted by the fact that, all that time ago, the Chartists foresaw the perversion of democracy that we suffer from now. Once every four or five years, one party persuades the country to vote for it.

That persuasion is often not achieved by legitimate means. It is carried out by the use of money, half truths and bribery by a party. I can give the House an example of that as I had a ten-minute Bill on the subject. We no longer control the national spending by parties on elections. The proportion is £9 by the Conservative party, £4 by Labour and £1 by the Liberal Democrats. There is no check on that whatsoever.

One of the advantages enjoyed by the governing party in the elections was that it was given poster sites, which could not be obtained by the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats, by the Imperial Tobacco Company. That company told me in a letter that it did that because it knew that the Government had promised not to ban tobacco advertising. That was a thoroughly illegitimate way of obtaining advantage. We also know that the Government used the powers of advertising to put forward to the electorate an untruth about tax policy. However, on one day every five years over the past 15 years, the Government have persuaded the country to support them. On almost every one of the other days, a majority in the country opposed the Government. That is not the proper way to run a democracy.

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

I shall not repeat the main points that were raised so eloquently by my hon. Friend. However, we have a real difficulty in Wales because Wales has the largest democratic deficit of any country, certainly in the European Union. The democracies of eastern Europe emerged while our democracy in Wales was abused and battered more than ever before.

Just over a fortnight ago, I was part of a panel on democracy in the European election campaign. One candidate admitted that he did not believe in democracy; he did not think that it was a good thing. He thought that the world should be run by 7,000 yogic fliers: these people had a special knowledge and they would get together, unelected, and decide everything. We have people in Wales who are not, I think, qualified as yogic fliers, but they are qualified as members of one party which cannot win elections in Wales. Fellow travellers of that party sit on quangos in Wales.

Over the past 15 years, we have seen an enormous growth in the power of quangos and the amount of money that they use. They are staffed by people who cannot be elected—failed Conservative candidates in local and other elections that take place in Wales. At the same time as we have seen the process of unelected bodies growing in power, we have seen—as my hon. Friend pointed out—the denial of power, influence and resources for elected local councillors, so they have little power left now. Our democracy has been degraded by that process.

The civil service is a great worry. We do not often talk about the value of our civil service. However, 150 years ago, we reformed the civil service because, like most civil services in the world, it was corrupt and politicised. Despite 15 years of Thatcherism, and despite 15 years of promotion by people who were seen by the Government to be "one of us" and to have a certain political view, we still have a civil service that is the least corrupt and the least politicised of any civil service in the world.

What are we doing about it? We are offering the civil service to be market tested and, ultimately, privatised and contractualised, so that it will be run by people who are not devoted to public service. From the top to the bottom, civil servants are special. They have a special regard for their role, and they know that they are not out to make a profit. There is an element—often it is a powerful element—of service in that job. All political parties have had the benefit of a civil service that is not corrupt or partial. That is one of the great strengths of our democracy.

Because of the Government's fanaticism for believing that everything private is good and everything public is bad, we are about to sacrifice that. We are about to see the civil service shrink into a small core—that is the expressed wish of many Ministers—with all the main civil servants being run by commercial firms and working towards commercial ends. What we will end up with is what Governments in other countries are ill served by—civil servants who are partial, politicised and corrupt.

Never at any time in the past 150 years have we had so many cases of corruption in quangos and other public bodies, especially, sadly, in Wales. Almost every week, there has been a scandal in a public body in Wales over the past 12 months.

My hon. Friend mentioned the need to reorganise our democratic process. Our faith in the democratic process has collapsed—and so it should, because when most people go to vote they realise that their vote does not make any difference. The only votes that matter are those in the marginal seats. People who vote Conservative in Ebbw Vale or Labour down on the south coast realise that their vote does not make any difference whatever. It is only the small number of people in marginal seats who count.

We have seen the travesty of democracy that has occurred so many times. The worst example was the 1983 election where a large number of people voted for the third party which had few representatives in the House. Unless we correct that situation and ensure that the views of voters are reflected in their representatives here, which we can do simply through the system that the Labour party is proposing, there will be a lack of respect for democracy.

Today, I spent some time looking at a Bill that went through the House in 1985. The Prime Minister was the Government spokesman, and the acting leader of the Labour party was the Opposition spokesman. It was an atrocious piece of legislation. If one is looking for a bad Bill, that was it. It introduced personal pensions and it was interesting to read some of the prophetic remarks of one of our former colleagues, Mr. Frank Haynes, then the Member for Ashfield. He told us clearly what would happen as a result of the Bill.

Tonight we heard about the legislation that set up the Child Support Agency. We are not an efficient democracy if we allow bad laws to pass, unchecked and without proper scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North mentioned another matter that has occurred to us during the past few days and it is interesting to note that the two are connected.

The Prime Minister declared his views on civilising our procedures and stopping us from looking like an entertainment, for which he would receive warm support from all corners of the House, as happened in the debate yesterday. We are legislators. Legislation is not a spectator sport, or something to be enjoyed. It is not something for people outside to view for their entertainment, but we are seen in that way and it demeans our role and the people's view of us.

How sad it was that, when someone attempted to take up the challenge that the Prime Minister made by asking us to send him our questions so that he could think about them and give a considered response, his answer to a serious question that involved the pensions of 6 million very anxious people and did not include combative words or try to strike any political advantage was not reasonable or civilised and did not produce light rather than heat. An editorial in *The Times* described his answer as a typical civil service briefing, followed by a cheap political jibe.

Can we really take the Government seriously when they talk about reform of the House of Commons unless they show by their deeds as well as their words that they are serious about it?

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North dealt ably with the legal system. At a more humble level, how are magistrates selected and whom do they represent? The lord lieutenant of a county chairs the committee that selects its magistrates. Being a lord lieutenant is hardly a democratic job. I applied for it once. I wrote to the Queen and said that I had noticed that all the lords lieutenant in my county had been prominent freemasons with brilliant military careers who lived in large houses surrounded by their own grounds. They were all white, male Gentiles, rich enough to do a job without any salary. I asked the Queen

whether she thought that I, as a shift worker in the steel works who thought that he could do a reasonable job, could be considered for it. I received a brief and polite reply, but my application was unsuccessful.

The Guardian recently picked about 12 lords lieutenant at random and found, amazingly, that every one had been to Eton—hardly a cross-section of society, but they chair the committees that select magistrates. It is not surprising that, even in an area such as mine where we elect Labour Members of Parliament with very large majorities, most magistrates declare themselves to be supporters of the Conservative party. It is highly dangerous when we can draw maps of our towns and find that the magistrates come from one area and the defendants from another. That cannot be a good thing if we want a magistracy who can understand the people who come before them.

My final point relates to language in this House. My hon. Friend said that we should have the right to use the language of our choice. This is the only Parliament that Wales has. Wales is England's first and, sadly, last colony, but if I were to speak in the original and ancient language of Wales I should be declared out of order. It has the same status here as riotous behaviour.

Yet there are Parliaments in the world which can deal with eight or nine languages perfectly happily. You are looking nervous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I shall not speak in Welsh. On one occasion when Madam Speaker was in the Chair, I spoke in the words of Chaucer, which were totally unintelligible to almost everyone in the Chamber. I would be quite in order to speak in those words, and I shall for a moment:

"Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendered is the flour."

I shall stop there. But those lovely words of Chaucer are English—not Anglo-Saxon or Norman French. They are perfectly in order in this House, but they are gibberish to most people. Yet I cannot speak in Welsh, a language understandable by 20 hon. Members, in the House because that language is denied in the House.

We look forward to the day when all of the lovely languages of these islands—Irish, Gaelic and Welsh—can be spoken here. That is one of our fundamental human rights.

9.25 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I must say to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) that West Lothian and the Linlithgow constituency cannot complain about our lord lieutenant. He is the 23rd Earl of Morton, but he did leave school at 15 and was a chef, truck driver and building worker. He is a jolly good lord lieutenant.

In his quite outstanding speech—one which was more than ephemeral and will be much-thumbed by many people in the Labour party—my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) touched on the problem of Law Officers, and a Secretary of State for Justice.

Often in life, one does not know that one is missing something until suddenly one does not have it. I am referring to the fact that the Scots do not have a Law Officer in the House of Commons. If anybody had told me 20 years ago that this was a serious situation, I think that I would have been relaxed about it. But one does not realise what is not there until one does not have it.

Perhaps I am obsessed with Lockerbie, but it was the biggest crime against western civilisation since 1945. One of the key Departments—proudly separate from the Scottish Office, incidentally—the Crown Office, through either the Solicitor-General or Lord Advocate, cannot be questioned in the House of Commons. I do not make a party point, but it is a deeply unsatisfactory situation.

Another truth about British government, which I am sure my hon. Friend has tumbled to, is that when there is a problem which affects one Department, it is often very efficiently dealt with. If it is in the domain of the Home Office—in my opinion, a very efficient Department—my experience is that usually one gets answers and there is a coherent policy. Equally, if something is clearly in the domain of the Department of Transport, there is again a good reply; and that is also the case with the powerful Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The trouble starts when a problem straddles two, three or four Departments.

I do not say that simply because it is an excuse for raising a subject which I would have wished to raise in a second Adjournment debate, but the gods were against me on this occasion for reasons which I shall not go into. It was an erosion of the rights of Parliament, and that is why I interrupted my hon. Friend to say that we should be careful about getting rid of anachronisms. The second Adjournment debate was an anachronism. It was highly inconvenient, but it was often an opportunity to air subjects of great urgency. Therefore, we should be careful about cutting down on what seem to be the sillinesses and slownesses of the parliamentary system.

The subject of Lockerbie straddles the Crown Office, the Foreign Office, and it must be a matter of considerable concern to the Home Office. It is of considerable concern to the debate, because if we are talking about international conventions on civil rights, two groups have civil rights in this matter. One group must surely be the relatives of the victims of Pan-Am 103. They have their rights to the truth. Another group with rights are the 5,000 or so of our fellow countrymen who are working in Libya and are affected by sanctions.

If Lockerbie were simply a matter of history some years ago and that nothing could be done about it, people like me would not be bothering the House of Commons at every available opportunity about it. It is an on-going issue because it is vitiating many of our relations with the Arab world. Only today, when I attended the Nuclear Forum, the most bitter complaints were made by senior executives of Babcock and Wilcox that orders that might have gone to Libya from Britain are going from South Korea. The effects of Lockerbie represent an on-going cost to one of the Arab countries with which we were most friendly.

Now is not the time to go into the details of the Libyan connection. I do not want to chance my arm and I hope that I am not a parliamentary cheat in the sense of commenting on one subject under the guise of another. I have one question only to put to the Government as a whole, not least to the Home Office: what on earth do the British Government think are their obligations in trying to get to the truth of the Lockerbie crime?

The law department has sat back and its behaviour has been described as simplistic by Queen's counsel in Scotland. Its officers have merely said, " Well, if anybody brings us any evidence, that would be a different matter." Consider what has happened within the past seven days. A man said to a court in Beirut, "I put that bomb on Pan-Am

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

103." Surely that is a matter on which there should be an investigation. Ministers should report to Parliament on its progress.

All I am asking for at this stage is that some Minister says," We take this claim seriously. It may not be true, but we have sent out some detectives to talk to the Lebanese and Syrian legal authorities in relation to the court case." Perhaps those detectives will come back and report that that individual just mentioned Lockerbie in order to prolong his case so that he would not go to the scaffold for the quite different crime of murdering a Jordanian diplomat. We do not know whether anything active is being done.

Part of the reason for the dissatisfaction felt by some of us is that we are not persuaded that the British Government really want to get at what could be an extremely embarrassing truth. I find it absolutely incredible that in the 800 pages of her memoirs the former Prime Minister does not mention Lockerbie once. What she does say is that it was justified, of course, to send planes to attack the working class areas of Benghazi and Tripoli. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North has already said, that is what happened. Planes were allowed to take off without any discussion. It was justified on the ground that the Libyan state would never again take part in terrorist activities. Who had better information from the intelligence services than the former Prime Minister?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I fully appreciate the points which the hon. Gentleman made previously. With his long experience in the House, the last thing that he would ever do would be to cheat. He need not inform the House of that; the House knows it. However, he is now going a little beyond what the debate is about.

Mr. Dalyell: I shall return rapidly to the covenant for civil rights. The international travelling public—not only people like Jim Swire and Martin Cadman, parents of the British victims, but the Americans, including those youngsters from Rochester university and their relatives who were on that plane in the pre-Christmas rush only because seats had been cancelled by American officials —have a right to know that the British and American Governments are doing everything humanly possible to get to the truth of that crime.

I use the debate simply as a parliamentary opportunity to ask whether there will be a proper follow-up to what happened in Beirut. I took the trouble to go and talk to the Dumfries and Galloway police in Dumfries. I make no criticism whatever of the policemen. I am concerned about the Government Departments with which those policemen must liaise. I ask the crisp question: is anything being done to establish the veracity or otherwise of what happened last week in that Beirut court?

9.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said that he hoped that he was not a parliamentary cheat. The entire House will agree that he is no such thing. I have often listened intently and with respect to what he has said. The House will agree, however, that he occasionally allows his enthusiasm and single-mindedness for a subject to allow him to travel at will across the boundaries and definitions of "order". But that is a matter for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. While I respect his having made a point about Lockerbie this evening, I do not intend to follow him down that road, and I see from your demeanour, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I would be wise to stick to that course.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) made an admirably succinct speech. I share his admiration for the standards in the civil service, but disagree fundamentally with his suggestion that the civil service should not be more businesslike. He might have learnt lessons from the late 1970s, when one looked at the need then to control public expenditure. I predict that, in successive Parliaments in the years ahead, the civil service will have to live with ever tighter financial constraints. It is right that it should learn useful lessons from the world of commerce, never trying to run the civil service as a business but being more businesslike in its approach.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on obtaining this debate, which provides an opportunity to discuss—in some detail, as we have heard —civil and political rights in the United Kingdom. I know of his enthusiasm for cricket. As I listened to him, I thought to myself, as he started and as he aimed for a few boundaries, that perhaps he was emulating his good friend who once played for Nottinghamshire, the former captain of the West Indies, Sir Garfield Sobers, but, as minute followed minute and five minutes followed five minutes, I obtained the distinct impression that he was seeking to emulate Joe Hardstaff; he was here to bat all day, and all night if necessary. I think that he appreciates the point I make.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in suggesting that the United Kingdom is in the dock in any way for its record on civil and political rights. That cannot be the case. Sadly, his claims about an interest in the subject are not borne out by the attendance in the Chamber this evening. The debate was at an early hour. He made a speech that might well have been listened to by more hon. Members, but, sadly, that was not the case.

I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's desire to modernise some of the operating procedures in Parliament, but I disagree with him fundamentally when he suggests that written rights should somehow stand above the sovereignty of Parliament. Our system of parliamentary democracy, based on the complementary roles of two Chambers and buttressed by the independence of the judiciary, continues to serve us well, as it has done for a long time.

Before I discuss the subject of the debate, I should like to discuss two or three arguments that the hon. Gentleman made. He spoke about the right of silence. Under the law of all three UK jurisdictions, any person suspected of a criminal offence has, and will continue to have, the right to remain silent at all stages of the criminal process. The burden of proof on the prosecution to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt remains unchanged.

The law on the right of silence that we propose to enact in England and Wales does not alter those basic principles of our law. The right of silence provisions simply allow the courts, in certain limited circumstances, to draw an inference from a suspect's silence when it is appropriate to do so, alongside other evidence, in determining guilt or innocence.

The hon. Gentleman discussed subjects that are familiar to him, and to me, because we have debated them long and hard in the Chamber and in Committees—immigration and asylum. I do not propose, although the temptation is there, to turn the debate into a fully fledged debate on those subjects. I draw just two points to the hon. Gentleman's attention.

He spoke about the abolition of appeals against refusal of visit visas. He did not—I think that he could not have done so—name any other country, with or without a written constitution, that signed up to the international covenant that is the subject of our debate that has a right of appeal against the refusal of visit visas. He knows, as the House knows, that that right existed for only 23 years, I think, on the statute book, and it is not a right whose demise will cause serious lament.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about asylum seekers and about their being detained en masse. He might have explained to the House that less than 1.5 per cent. of asylum applicants are detained, and that they are detained because of the judgment that they will not comply with reporting restrictions. He also spoke about them as asylum seekers, and he well knows that the vast majority of people detained in Campsfield house are people whose asylum applications have already been determined and who are there enjoying a right of appeal, or perhaps have had their appeal refused and are awaiting fresh documentation from their home countries because they have destroyed their documentation.

I return to the the subject of the international covenant for civil and political rights. I shall shortly describe the way in which the United Kingdom meets its obligations and responsibilities under the covenant, but it may be helpful if I refer briefly to the origin and content of that instrument. Under the United Nations charter of 1945, the international community pledged itself to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As a first definition of those rights and freedoms, the universal declaration of human rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948 as

"a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations".

More than 40 years later, the universal declaration remains an essential statement of human rights by which Governments around the world can measure their progress in that field.

It was always recognised, however, that the universal declaration would not create legally binding obligations. Therefore, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights undertook the drafting of two legally binding instruments—one covering civil and political rights, the other dealing with economic, social and cultural rights. The two covenants were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966.

The international covenant for civil and political rights took effect in the United Kingdom in 1976. Based largely on those contained in the universal declaration of human rights, the covenant puts into legally binding treaty form a wide range of civil and political rights and seeks to meet the problems of protecting those rights in practice. The rights contained in the covenant are comparable to those contained in the European convention on human rights and include the right to life, to liberty and security of the person and to freedom of thought, expression, assembly and association. More than 100 countries are now parties to the covenant.

The principal question that arises from our ratification of the covenant, and that which most clearly separates the hon. Member for Nottingham, North and myself, is the best means of providing for the rights recognised in the covenant in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman believes that the only way to protect human rights in this country is to incorporate an international human rights instrument—like the covenant or the European convention on human rights—into domestic law. The rights and protections afforded to the British people would, he said this evening, be transformed if only such an instrument were entrenched in our constitution.

As the House well knows, that approach runs counter to the way in which rights and freedoms have been protected in this country over many centuries. The Government do not accept the case of those who argue that the incorporation into domestic law of the broadly drafted propositions of an international instrument would, in practice, clarify and strengthen liberties in the United Kingdom. On the contrary, it would weaken the current position by making the law unclear and uncertain.

The basis of liberty in this country is the long-established principle that a person is free to do as he wishes unless the law requires otherwise. Under our constitution, unlike that of many other countries, rights and freedoms are the natural possession of the individual, not something conferred by the state. That possession is assumed—it is not dependent on some constitutional device and it can be limited only by a democratic decision of Parliament. An individual seeking to know his rights has only to consult the law to establish what he cannot do; he does not have to consult a constitutional lawyer to find out what he can do.

If we accepted the view of the hon. Gentleman, we would overturn that principle and weaken the system of parliamentary democracy in this country. The areas of public policy covered by the general principles contained in the international covenant and the European convention have traditionally, and rightly, been the province of Parliament rather than the courts. Where this is necessary, it is for Parliament to enact detailed legislation on matters that affect the rights of the individual. It must have regard to the United Kingdom's obligations under those international instruments to which we are party, but the final decision rests with Parliament.

Incorporation would transfer this final responsibility to the judiciary, enabling the courts to strike down legislation that had been approved by Parliament. That would not, I believe, be a welcome addition to their present role of interpreting and enforcing specific legislation. The important issue is not the competence or good faith of our judiciary, but whether it is desirable or appropriate for such matters to rest with judges, who are not directly accountable to the public, rather than with democratically elected Members of Parliament. The Government's view remains that it is not.

Our opposition to incorporation does not, however, affect our continuing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights in the United Kingdom. The lack of such formal provision in the United Kingdom does not detract from our major contribution to the preparation and implementation of instruments such as the international covenant for civil and political rights.

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

Article 40 of the covenant requires each state party to submit to the human rights committee established under article 28 a report at regular intervals on the measures adopted to give effect to the rights recognised in the covenant. The United Kingdom submitted a periodic report in 1977, 1984 and 1989; our fourth periodic report is due to reach the United Nations in August this year. A state party is subject to public, oral examination by the human rights committee on each of its reports; the United Kingdom was examined on its third periodic report in 1991.

The Government value the system of reporting and examination as an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness with which they meet their obligations under the covenant. Each periodic report contains a factual account of the legislation and administrative practice in the country relevant to the articles of the covenant and, collectively, the reports demonstrate the progress that we have made in ensuring that people in the United Kingdom enjoy the rights and protections for which the covenant provides. As with previous reports, copies of the fourth periodic report will, on publication, be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and be made freely available outside Parliament.

In describing the way in which the United Kingdom meets its covenant obligations, the fourth periodic report will be able to draw on a substantial body of legislative and administrative changes in recent years, which strengthen further the protection given in practice to individual rights and liberties in this country. I should like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the more significant developments.

Articles 2 and 3 of the covenant require non-discrimination on grounds of race, gender or other improper grounds in the enjoyment of the rights recognised in the covenant.

The 1991 census of population was the first to include a question on ethnic origin, and has provided much information on the size and distribution of the ethnic minority population, which will help the Government, local authorities, employers and others to identify inequalities and plan action to overcome them.

The Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 and the Race Relations (Remedies) Act 1994 amend the Race Relations Act 1976 to strengthen the statutory protection against racial discrimination, while changes to the immigration rules expected to come into force later this year will remove virtually all the sexually discriminatory elements of our immigration control.

Article 7 prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In order to meet its obligations under this article and under the United Nations and Council of Europe conventions against torture to which we are also party, the Government are keen to ensure that rigorous mechanisms are in place to enable people to lodge any complaint they may have about their treatment in detention.

So it was that, in April this year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary appointed a prisons ombudsman to consider grievances from prisoners once they had exhausted the internal complaint procedures. In February this year, the Scottish prison service introduced a new system for dealing with prisoners' requests and complaints.

In Northern Ireland in December 1992, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State appointed an independent assessor of military complaints procedures to provide an independent check on the Army's own procedures for dealing with complaints against its personnel serving in the Province.

In immigration, visiting committees have been appointed at the detention centres where detainees are held for more than a few days, while arrangements have been introduced by all police authorities in England and Wales for members of the public to be appointed as lay visitors to police stations.

Article 9 deals with the right to liberty and security of the person, and here the further safeguards introduced for those in police detention in Northern Ireland are relevant. The codes of practice for the detention and treatment of persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 came into force on 1 January this year.

Any police officer failing to comply with the codes is liable to disciplinary proceedings. The codes of practice represent a further important safeguard for those detained at the main police offices or holding centres. Other safeguards include the monitoring of all interviews on closed-circuit television and the appointment in December 1992 of an independent commissioner for the holding centres to observe and report on the conditions in which detainees are held.

Article 10 addresses the treatment of prisoners. Here we shall refer to the openness of the new parole system under the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Prisoners will receive a copy of their parole dossier, be interviewed by a member of the parole board and given reasons for their parole decision. We shall also be able to report on the new system for dealing with life sentence prisoners and on the development of sentence planning and through care in the prison service.

Article 13 concerns the expulsion of aliens, and a development of particular note, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, which came into force in July last year. The Act provides for accelerated and streamlined asylum procedures to ensure that unfounded asylum applications are dealt with expeditiously and with finality, while genuine refugees continue to be protected.

One of the main provisions introduced by the 1993 Act is an in-country right of appeal—with an oral hearing before an independent special adjudicator—for all refused asylum applicants, regardless of their immigration status. Together with other important safeguards contained in the Act, that represents a considerable strengthening of the rights of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom.

Other developments relevant to our covenant obligations include the provision of the Education Act 1993 for the establishment of grant-maintained schools of a religious character, which falls under article 18, on freedom of religion; the implementantion of the Children Act 1989 and the United Kingdom's ratification of the UN convention on the rights of the child, which are relevant to article 24, on children's rights; and the Welsh Language Act 1993, which, in accordance with the cultural rights

conferred by article 27, further promotes and facilitates the use of the Welsh language—even if that does not extend to the Chamber of the House of Commons.

A further provision—to which the hon. Member for Nottingham, North has referred before—is the first optional protocol to the covenant, which recognises the competence of the human rights committee to receive and consider communications from individuals who claim that their rights under the covenant have been violated.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, the United Kingdom has not ratified that optional protocol because, since 1966, an adequate and effective means of redress has been available to individuals in the United Kingdom through the procedures and institutions established under the European convention on human rights. The hon. Gentleman and I have debated that in the House on other occasions.

The protection afforded by that machinery is now familiar and well used. The Government do not believe that the position of people in this country would be significantly enhanced by the ratification of the optional protocol. The United Kingdom has signed the 11th protocol to the European convention, which, among other things, makes mandatory and permanent the right of individual petition to the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister for giving way with his usual courtesy.

If it is appropriate for an individual's human rights to be heard before a court in Strasbourg before German, Italian and French judges, why may they not be heard in a domestic court before a British judge?

Mr. Wardle: As the hon. Gentleman knows, even Joe Hardstaff used to come out for a second innings from time to time. The hon. Gentleman either has not been listening, or has missed the point of what I have been saying for the past 15 minutes or so. If he reads *Hansard*, he will see that it is absolutely clear. He and I have fundamentally different approaches. I have set out my view, and because of the lateness of the hour, I do not intend to repeat all that I have said.

I have demonstrated the United Kingdom's commitment to its obligations and responsibilities under the international covenant. They are to be seen in the legislation that we have enacted—which I have just listed—and the administrative reforms that we have instituted, some of which I have mentioned. They reflect the practical rather than philosophical approach to human rights that we have always taken in this country. That brings me to the point to which the hon. Gentleman has just alluded.

We are less concerned with fine-sounding constitutional provisions than with ensuring that, in reality, the rights and freedoms of the people in the United Kingdom are fully in accordance with our international obligations. The Government look forward to continued progress in this regard, within the framework provided by the covenant.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL [*Lords*].

Order for consideration read.
To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Car Industry

1. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the prospects for the British car industry.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): It may be for the convenience of the House if I explain that the President of the Board of Trade is in the land of the midnight sun, and the Minister for Industry is attending the Industry Council in Luxembourg. I am sure that they would like me to pass on their apologies for not being here.

Prospects for the British car industry have never been better. The industry is in the healthiest state that it has been for a long time; new car sales and new car production figures have both shown increases during the last year at a time when other markets, particularly in Europe, have been depressed.

Mr. Atkinson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer, and congratulate him on his appointment.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there has been a revolution in the fortunes of the British car industry in the past 15 years? That is well exemplified by the experience of Nissan UK in the north-east of England: last year, it exported more British-built cars than any other car manufacturer in the country. I hope that my right hon. Friend agrees that that is a tribute to the company, the commitment of its workers and, in particular, the flexible industrial and labour-relations policies introduced by the present Government.

Mr. Needham: In 1979, the United Kingdom's car industry was on the way out; now, it is on the way up. In 1979, when the Labour party was last in office, just over 1 million cars were produced; now, production is up by some 30 per cent. Employment is now at 132,000, as against 290,000, so productivity has doubled. Investment in the car industry is now three times as great as it was in 1979. Furthermore, by the end of the decade, the British car industry will be back in surplus on the balance of trade. Other parts of British industry can learn a wonderful lesson from that; another lesson to be learnt is what a Labour Government will do to people, and what a Conservative Government actually achieve.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: As well as congratulating the British car industry as a whole on the success enjoyed by Nissan, will the Minister recognise the efforts made by Jaguar of late, and the fact that it is now re-employing staff whom it had laid off during the past few years? Will he recognise that the biggest problem faced by such firms as Jaguar over the years has been the lack of a decent supply base in this country—along with gross fluctuations in the currency, largely as a result of the economic policies pursued by his Government? When will he take measures to enhance the industrial base and to supply a stable economic policy leading to the long-term benefit of the car industry?

Mr. Needham: The biggest barriers to the success of the British car industry over the years—until this Government came to power and changed the laws on industrial relations—were the antics of the trade union movement. I am delighted to say that the trade union movement has now accepted the need for the unions themselves to be able to show that they are responsible and respectable partners with industry. That is one thing that the Government have achieved. I commend "The Dawn of a New Era", introduced by the president of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. That fundamental change would never have taken place without the legislation passed by the Government.

I do not believe for a moment that the position of Jaguar has anything to do with the factors mentioned by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth). Furthermore, our automated components suppliers are now some of the most efficient in Europe. They are starting to export all over Europe and the rest of the world, and they will play a vital part in increasing our manufacturing and engineering exports in the next few years.

Industrial Prospects

2. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next proposes to meet representatives from the Confederation of British Industry to discuss industrial prospects.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. Friend maintains close contact with the CBI on a wide range of issues, including the prospects of UK industry.

Mr. Arnold: Bearing in mind recent reports that British industry's confidence is now at a five-year high and that the British economy is growing faster than any other in the European Community, is not it tragic that, at this moment, our lines of distribution and supply should be disrupted by the selfish behaviour of the rail union?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend. The rail strike is bad for business, bad for employees, a number of whom are losing wages because they cannot get to work, and bad for Britain's image overseas. What contributes to all that is the obfuscation of the Opposition, who are not prepared to condemn irresponsible action by trade unions.

Mr. Hardy: In the discussions, did the Minister deal with the problem of industries, such as the engineering and

steel industry, which face grossly unfair competition from our European partners? If so, will he tell the House what he told them? What urgent action is being taken to remedy that unsatisfactory position?

Mr. Eggar: I am sure that my right hon. Friend has discussed that issue with leaders of industry and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry is now discussing it in the European Union.

Mr. Sykes: Does my hon. Friend agree that British prospects are immeasurably enhanced by the competitiveness of British industry today? Will he remark on the prospects for competitiveness in the rail industry as a result of today's strike? While he is about it, will he try to find out what the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) thinks about today's rail strike?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is a belated moderniser within the Labour party. He seems to mix up obfuscation with modernisation.

Mr. Cousins: Let me take that question off on a different track. Now that the aims of clause 4 have been achieved and every British company has majority shareholdings which are common owners, does the Minister agree with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury that the relationship between those common owners and the people responsible for running industry is not the right one on which to secure a long-term basis for investment and finance?

Mr. Eggar: That question may make sense within the arcane intricacies of the Labour party's leadership contest and the various complications with regard to whether the modernising arm or acting leader of the Labour party wishes to do away with clause 4, but it makes no sense to the rest of the House or to the country.

Mr. Butcher: I welcome Britain's almost unique position in Europe and its industrial prospects. Does my hon. Friend agree that one reason why world stock markets have been falling is the growing realisation that there is a worldwide shortage of capital because Governments are syphoning off too much money to fund their deficits? Given the excellent work that his Department has done on competitiveness, would we not have a conspicuous competitive edge if we were to provide the most attractive taxation regime for capital taxation in the western hemisphere? Will he champion that cause?

Mr. Eggar: I agree that Government deficits are bound to influence worldwide interest rates. I have taken careful note of my hon. Friend's preference on capital taxation and shall ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is aware of what he said.

Nuclear Review

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he can now give about the timetable for the nuclear review.

Mr. Eggar: The industry's commercial case for new stations has now been published. The Government have invited submissions from all interested parties, including comments on that case, by 30 September. We will consider carefully all representations received.

Mr. Hughes: Is not the Government's timetable the latest in the rather inglorious series of privatisations of energy industries? First we have indecision, then we have delay and then we have botch up. Will the Minister come clean on the following questions? Why is the Green Paper being written by the nuclear industry, not the Government? Why are the Government being inconsistent by not saying that they will make anyone who buys the nuclear industry take responsibility for all the liabilities—past, present and to come?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman should do two things. First, he should do the House the courtesy of studying exactly what the Government have said. There is no question of the Government publishing a Green Paper in the first place and there is no question whatsoever of the nuclear industry writing that Green Paper. Secondly, I suggest that he sticks to windmills.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to congratulate Nuclear Electric plc on the remarkable turnaround which that company has achieved, which has put it on course to achieve an operating profit by next year, before the nuclear levy? Will he seriously consider the submissions to the nuclear review from Nuclear Electric, which make it clear that the best thing that could happen to that company is for it to be freed from state ownership and allowed to compete freely in the private sector?

Mr. Eggar: We shall obviously want to consider carefully the representations that have been made, at some considerable length, by Nuclear Electric and the other elements in the nuclear industry. The banter that issues from the Opposition whenever reference is made to improvements in the record of the nuclear industry is not only a disgrace but unfair to the many thousands of people who work in that industry, a number of whom belong to trade unions that support the Labour party.

Mr. O'Neill: Whose review—that of the Department of Trade and Industry, that of the Department of the Environment or that of the Scottish Office—will be responsible for consideration of on-site dry storage? It seems that that aspect of nuclear waste management is being lost. There have been lengthy public inquiries into it, and there have been reports, but it has not been included in the current review. Therefore, it should be dealt with separately since it has gone through the judicial process. Should not there be a clear line on that, and does not it have to be resolved quickly, because it enters into all the commercial judgments that will have to be made?

Mr. Eggar: That relates to a decision that has to be taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. My understanding is that he has decided to await the radioactive waste management study that is being carried out by the Department of the Environment, but obviously waste management and storage must be considered carefully in the context of the nuclear review.

Food Producers

5. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to reduce the competitive disadvantages facing United Kingdom food producers within the EU single market.

Mr. Needham: British food producers are competitive. They are winning business in the single market. The UK's exports of foodstuffs to the European Union increased from more than £2.7 billion in 1990 to £3.8 billion in 1993. That is an increase of 40 per cent. The Government are backing that excellent performance with support for marketing and exports.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Minister satisfied that the GATT regime and the EU single market mechanisms are sufficient to deal with the problem of subsidised dumping of agricultural and horticultural produce, and especially the salad produce that is coming to this country at prices below production cost? Has he seen the evidence about that issue that the National Farmers Union has put before hon. Members?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman is the Liberal Democrat spokesman on agriculture. I cannot understand why he is asking me what is obviously an agricultural question. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has considered the question that he has posed and has not found any evidence to the effect that he has suggested. If the hon. Gentleman has that evidence, I suggest that he does two things—first, write to the Minister direct and, secondly, ask the Minister about it on Thursday.

Mr. Nicholls: Is not the biggest disadvantage to food producers in the EC the possibility of over-regulation by Brussels? Is not it a profound piece of cheek for a representative of the Liberal Democrat party to come along to the House, representing a party which would give away our veto in Europe and lie down to anything that is imposed on it by Brussels, and then shed crocodile tears all over the green leather about regulation from Europe?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend, representing as he does a seat in the west country, knows as well as I do that what the Liberal party says in the constituencies, in the House of Commons and in Brussels is mutually contradictory. We should not be surprised about that; we should just make sure that our constituents know it.

Advanced Technology Programmes

7. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the effects of the cuts in the advanced technology programmes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The advanced technology programmes had been running for six years. We will be spending the money that was previously devoted to them on new activities. These were set out in the competitiveness White Paper and will help the majority of firms to get better access to, and advice on, technology.

Mrs. Campbell: Is not the Minister aware that cutting the advanced technology programmes has led to 25 scientists and engineers being made redundant at the Welding institute in Abington, near Cambridge? Does not he realise that bewildered industrialists cannot understand why the Government are inflicting such home-grown damage on a firm that is the major promoter of technology transfer in the United Kingdom?

Mr. McLoughlin: As I said, the programmes had been running for six years. We have to examine the best way of using the resources that we have at the Department of Trade and Industry. Is the hon. Lady calling for more spending, for higher taxes or for cutting borrowing?

Mrs. Gillan: The advanced technology programmes have been a success. Has my hon. Friend had a chance to look at AEA Technology, which has performed impressive diversification into neural networks and environmental science? Is he aware that the firm is operating under some uncertainty, waiting for a statement about its privatisation? Is he in a position to tell me when such a statement will be forthcoming?

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend's point is well taken. We are considering the matter, and we hope to be able to make an announcement of the sort that she requires shortly. That is a matter for my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, who has taken note of what she says.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Minister confirm that the Government have cut tens of millions of pounds from industrial collaborative research funding for textiles, printing, paper and other manufactured products? Why are they the only Government in Europe cutting funding for collaborative research in those industries?

Mr. McLoughlin: As I have said, we always have to look at the best way of using our resources. We are helping a number of companies by means of the Business Links offices that we are setting up throughout the country. The EC research and development budget will grow by 5 per cent. per annum until 1999, and the Government contribute to that budget. The recently published R and D scoreboard shows a welcome 9 per cent. increase in R and D investment in United Kingdom companies.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my hon. Friend note that the competitiveness White Paper enhances the work done in the science White Paper? The Government really are trying to achieve better collaboration between industry and the academic community in their various programmes. I welcome the advances being made in the technology foresight programme, for instance.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning a number of areas of collaboration, and the money that we are spending through the links programme, the small firms merit award for research and technology programme and various other programmes by which we are helping industry. My hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the foresight programme, which is an important one.

Post Office

8. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the future of the Post Office since 19 May.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has received approximately 830 representations since 19 May expressing a range of views on the future of the Post Office. These matters will be addressed in the Green Paper, which will be published shortly.

Mr. Barnes: Will the Minister give me a categorical assurance that there will be no VAT on parcels, no further closures of rural post offices and no worsening of this great public service? Why does not he follow the views of the

Union of Communication Workers, which seeks commercial freedom for the Post Office, not its destruction by elements of privatisation?

Mr. McLoughlin: If the Union of Communication Workers adopts the same stance as that taken by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, it is most unlikely that I will agree with anything that it says.

We have looked hard at the issue of VAT on stamps; we have consulted the European Commission; we are satisfied that privatisation will not mean the imposition of VAT. As for rural post offices, the hon. Gentleman should be thinking about how to give them more work so as to ensure that people want to take them on. Of the 20,000 post offices, 19,000 are in the private sector. I want them to succeed and to get the increased business that they require so as to ensure that people want to take them on as viable businesses.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Post Office is one of the world's finest distribution companies but that if it is to prosper it must be allowed greater access to capital markets for investment and expansion? Does not he think that the best way to ensure the future of rural post offices is to unshackle the Post Office from state ownership?

Mr. McLoughlin: As I have said, we shall shortly publish a Green Paper outlining a number of options for consideration. We shall say in that Green Paper which is our favoured option. If rural post offices are to survive, we need to find a way to ensure that people are prepared to take them on as businesses. Some 19,000 post offices are in the private sector. Usually, rural post offices close because nobody wishes to take on those ventures.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Minister recognise that the President of the Board of Trade has stirred up a hornets' nest on this issue and that people are genuinely angered? Why do not the Government concentrate on building a successful public enterprise with the requisite commercial freedom?

Mr. McLoughlin: The only people stirring up a hornets' nest on this are those in the Labour party who consistently say that somehow rural post offices are under threat. They speak as if the status quo is an option and say that the universal service and the universal tariff are under threat. There is no threat to either.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fears expressed about the Post Office are precisely the same as those that were expressed by the same people when British Telecom was privatised? Does he also agree that wherever privatisation has taken place there has been increased investment, improved productivity and a much better service for the customer?

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend rightly points to what has happened with British Telecom. My hon. Friends will remember that when we were privatising British Telecom we were consistently told by the Opposition that it would mean an end of all rural phone boxes because they would not be maintained. There are now more rural phone boxes and, even more remarkable, they actually work.

Mr. Robin Cook: If consultation on the forthcoming Green Paper confirms that the great majority of the Post Office's customers do not want it to be privatised, will the Government accept their verdict? Is the answer yes or no?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman wants a yes or no answer. When does he intend to give us a yes or no as to whether he supports the rail strike? Indeed, when will any member of the shadow Cabinet give us a yes or no answer—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been asked a question. He is a member of the Executive and he has a duty to answer it.

Mr. McLoughlin: We shall, of course, take note of what is said in the light of the publication of the Green Paper, but we will also want to make sure that our proposals will ensure a good future for the Post Office. There are some serious questions to be asked about that. Even the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, an all-party committee, said that the status quo was not an option.

Lady Olga Maitland: Has my hon. Friend seen the comment by the chairman of the Post Office that the only way to a really secure future for the Post Office is for it to offer a wider range of services? Is not the campaign by the Labour party to scaremonger people into believing that rural post offices will be closed absolutely disgraceful?

Mr. McLoughlin: I have gone a long way to try to assure my hon. Friends and the House about my commitment and that of the Government on the question of a nationwide network of post offices. Unlike both the Opposition parties, ours was the only party to spell out in our manifesto the importance that we attach to a nationwide network of post offices. This week, the chairman of the Post Office rightly told us about some of the problems faced by the Post Office because of current restraints.

Lloyd's

9. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when next he proposes to visit Lloyd's to discuss future Government policy in relation to the insurance industry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I maintain regular contact with Lloyd's to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern.

Mr. O'Brien: In the light of the enormous losses sustained by names at Lloyd's and the importance of the insurance underwriting business in Britain, is it not about time that the Government undertook an urgent review of the works of the Lloyd's Act 1982 and the Financial Services Act 1986 with a view to moving away from self-regulation, which has patently failed, and towards a system of proper effective statutory regulation?

Mr. Hamilton: I shall give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt and ascribe his supplementary question to ignorance rather than malice. I hope that he is not wholly unaware of all the changes that have taken place in the governance of Lloyd's in recent years, and the substantial progress which has been made in returning the insurance

business generally to profitability. I wish that Opposition Members would concentrate more on supporting British industry rather than knocking it and running it down.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom's insurance industry is one of the jewels in the crown of UK plc, and that it is vital for the Government to continue to support the United Kingdom insurance industry and ensure that Lloyd's returns to success and profitability? Is it not indicative of the attitude of the Opposition that they are entirely motivated by ignorance and prejudice and a desire to run Britain down?

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I shall shortly be taking a delegation from the British insurance industry to Japan to try to break into the Japanese market, which in the past has been highly protected and controlled, because our industry is among the best and most innovative in the world and there are many opportunities for us to develop the insurance business and improve our overseas earnings.

Mr. Bell: Ignorance or malice is hardly a proper response from a Minister of the Crown who is normally courteous. If he would be kind enough to look again at the Lloyd's Act 1982, he will see that it provided for a financial institution to be above the law. That is why there has been exploitation. Are not those sufficient grounds for the Lloyd's Act 1982 and the Financial Services Act 1986 to be reviewed so that we can have full statutory regulation of Lloyd's that is both transparent and accountable to the House?

Mr. Hamilton: I certainly would not accuse the hon. Gentleman of being ignorant in this respect as he was a member of Lloyd's, but got out at the right time. However, he is misleading himself if he thinks that a system of statutory regulation might have provided a different result from that which was a consequence of the Lloyd's Act 1982. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Committee that considered the Lloyd's Act 1982 included two Opposition Members, including the current Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). It was therefore a decision of the entire House to put in place the regulatory system contained in the Lloyd's Act 1982. I believe that the changes that have been made within the framework of the Lloyd's Act 1982 will protect Lloyd's in future from many of the mistakes that occurred in the past and we look forward to the future with confidence.

Competitiveness

10. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next proposes to meet representatives from the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the White Paper on competitiveness.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and other DTI Ministers maintain close contact with the CBI on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Richards: Will my hon. Friend confirm that improving the competitiveness of the Post Office is a major objective of Government policy? Was he aware that last Monday I opened a new post office at Colwyn Heights in my constituency? Does not this enterprise by my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, signify a new future for the Post Office?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I wish Mr. and Mrs. Jones well in their venture of opening a post office. I hope to be able to provide them with new services which will produce more profitability for their business venture.

Mr. Barry Jones: Why do the Government not adopt a strategy for British manufacturing? Is not the reason for the total lack of convincing measures in the recent White Paper the fact that the Prime Minister will not let the President of the Board of Trade have a strategy for British manufacturing industry?

Mr. McLoughlin: That is rather at odds with the usual approach of the party that normally sings the TUC's song. So far, John Monks of the TUC has said:

"This White Paper is a welcome shift in the Government's approach to competitiveness".

The latest training and enterprise councils newsletter also stated:

"The Government's White Paper on Competitiveness has received a broad welcome by the TEC leaders".

I therefore reject what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Ward: Will my hon. Friend join me in approving the emphasis on small firms in the White Paper? Will he listen to their concern about the difficulty in collecting debts from some of their bigger brethren?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said on that point which, as he knows, was dealt with in the White Paper. We intend to introduce several measures to tackle late payment of debt. There have already been some welcome improvements in this country compared with other countries, but we will deal with the issue again if sufficient progress is not made.

Mr. Fatchett: Is it not a simple fact that the glossy, expensive, £600 per page White Paper contains no new ideas on investment, research and development on training, and no strategy to restore the strength of Britain's manufacturing industry? Does the Minister agree that the sheer bankruptcy of ideas in the White Paper is the reason why so many people feel that the President of the Board of Trade would make such a good chairman of the Conservative party?

Mr. McLoughlin: The White Paper deals with some of the issues of concern to Britain. There is no doubt that the policies advocated by the Opposition, such as the imposition of the social chapter on British industry, would do nothing to improve competitiveness.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Has not Britain's improvement in competitiveness been well shown this afternoon, for example in earlier answers about the automotive industry and industrial prospects? The very last thing that we need is the restoration of the destructive trade union practices of the past—including secondary picketing, which the Labour party is pledged to restore.

Mr. McLoughlin: I can assure my hon. Friend that there is no way in which the Government will backtrack on any of the trade union legislation that we have introduced, but the same cannot be said for the Opposition. More than 40 per cent. of the value of Japanese investment stock has come to the United Kingdom in inward investment and, in 1992, some 39 per cent. of the value of United States investment stock in the European Community came to

Britain. Other countries look to the United Kingdom as a place to invest because we have created the right climate for investment.

Life Assurance

11. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances a life assurance company is required to submit quarterly reports to his Department.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The power to require insurance companies to furnish information, including the submission of quarterly returns, may be exercised on any of the grounds set out in the Insurance Companies Act 1982. This power is most frequently used following authorisation or change of control.

Mr. Denham: Will the Minister confirm that Guardian —formerly Guardian Royal Exchange—is under constant review by his Department? Is he aware that some endowment policies sold by that company see £7 of growth in the life fund bringing only 70p of benefit to investors? Is it not one of the worst performing companies in the country and does not its appalling record of bad management and bad investment highlight another failure in the regulatory system for personal financial services? The Minister's Department monitors solvency and the regulatory organisations monitor marketing—why does no one ensure that the public get a fair deal?

Mr. Hamilton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it has been a long-standing practice of the Department of Trade and Industry—including the period when we had a Labour Government, if the hon. Gentleman's memory goes back that far—not to reveal the nature of its regulatory contact with individual companies.

Manufacturing Investment

12. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the level of investment by United Kingdom manufacturing industry in the last year for which figures are available; and what is the comparable figure in real terms for 10 years previously.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1993, manufacturing investment was £12.8 billion, compared with £6.9 billion in 1983. This was a welcome increase in real terms of 25 per cent.

Mr. Winterton: I welcome my hon. Friend's response, but does he accept that manufacturing industry is the sole provider of non-inflationary, sustainable growth in this country and as such requires a better deal from Government? If we are to reduce unemployment, we must regenerate our manufacturing base. Will he consider making appropriate representations within the Department and to the Cabinet through our right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to ensure that the Cabinet, through our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduces capital allowances to enable British industry to invest to the level necessary to create jobs and genuine wealth?

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend should not be so critical. Ours is one of the few countries in Europe seeing a reduction in unemployment. I am sure that my hon. Friend welcomes that. Manufacturing industry invested a greater proportion of its output in the 1980s than it did in the 1970s. Of real importance is a stable economic background, with low inflation and low interest rates. They are the most important influences on investment.

Mr. Burden: Is the Minister aware that Britain invests less of its national income in industry than virtually any other major industrial country and is he happy with that state of affairs?

Mr. McLoughlin: Of course one would like more investment, and that will be achieved by making Britain an attractive place in which to invest. Government policies have gone a long way to that end. Labour relations in this country are far better now than ever they were when Labour had anything to do with the government of this country. That is an important factor when companies decide where to invest.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that British industry is responding? It knows that if it designs products that the rest of the world wants to buy, manufactures them to a high quality, sells them at competitive prices and gives good after-sales service, it will lead the world. British industry is doing that now, which is why it is leading the world. If one buys from the United Kingdom, one travels first class.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am not sure that there is much that I can add to his comments.

Mr. Robin Cook: So that the House will not be misled, will the Minister admit that the 1993 investment figure in which he just took such pride is 13 per cent. down on 1979? On present industrial trends, it will be 1999 before manufacturing investment returns to the level of 20 years before, under Labour. Is that not a more honest measure of the deep damage that the Government have done to British industry? Does the Minister have the courage to admit that?

Mr. McLoughlin: I realise that I cannot ask questions, Madam Speaker, but the damage being done to this country is the support that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues continue to give strikers. If Britain has a reputation for strikes, it will not attract the kind of investment that both the hon. Gentleman and I want.

Assisted Area Status Grants

13. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many inquiries have been received by his Department for assisted area status grants from companies in Hastings and Rye; how many have converted into firm projects; and how many grants have been given.

Mr. Eggar: Precise figures for the number of initial telephone and written inquiries originating from Hastings and Rye are not available. Formal applications have been made, or are being worked up, in 22 cases from Hastings and Rye. Grant offers have been made in three of those cases. Two of the offers have been accepted so far.

Mrs. Lait: I thank my hon. Friend for that updated information. Is he aware that, after a shaky start, which caused enormous upsets to businesses in Hastings and Rye, the Department's performance has improved enormously? It has improved so much that the time taken to answer a letter has been reduced by 50 per cent. Can he assure me

that, in the spirit of greater competitiveness, the Department's speed of decision making will move nearer to that of businesses?

Mr. Eggar: The Department and I are grateful to my hon. Friend for actively pursuing her constituents' interests. We have learnt lessons about speed of response and improved the service. I am confident that we shall improve it still further. If there are any other difficulties, I am sure that my hon. Friend will inform me.

Competition

14. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent initiatives he has brought in to encourage more competition.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The White Paper on competitiveness reaffirmed the Government's commitment to maintaining competition and introducing it into new areas wherever possible.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that although part of our future lies in Europe, much of it lies in the Pacific basin, Latin America and South Africa? Those are the areas from which competition will come. If we are to compete with those emerging markets, would it not be disastrous if Brussels allowed the social charter into this country by the back door? Does my hon. Friend agree that some key directives should be renegotiated as soon as possible?

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree. As the internal market Minister, I miss no opportunity in the Council of Ministers to put those points to our partners. In recent years, Europe has clearly exported jobs to other parts of the world outside the Community, including those that my hon. Friend named. It is vital that all European countries grasp the nettle of improving competitiveness. On-costs for employers in the United Kingdom are 25 per cent. lower than in Germany, which is a matter of increasing concern to the German Government.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that the competitiveness of British industry has been aided greatly by the efficiency improvements at Companies House and the Patent Office, which have been supported enthusiastically by the trade unions at those two agencies? Will the Minister deny a scurrilous report in *The Guardian* today suggesting that the President of the Board of Trade said that the trade unions at those two agencies are always against change? Will the Minister confirm that the President of the Board of Trade would never make a statement so insensitive, so untrue and so stupid?

Mr. Hamilton: Denying a scurrilous report in *The Guardian* would be an act of supererogation on my part. However, I can certainly confirm that efficiency has improved greatly at Companies House under this Government and we look forward to future efficiency gains as well.

Mr. Gallie: Has my hon. Friend seen a recent Scottish engineering report which shows that output volumes are up, capacity utilisation is up, recruitment is up and orders are up? Does that not suggest that Scottish engineering is competitive and is it not welcome news which Opposition Members would rather deny than proclaim?

Mr. Hamilton: I have not seen the report, but I have just heard it.

Coal Industry

15. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the procedure accepted by British Coal for offering individual coal mines for sale to the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal has offered pits for lease and licence, not for sale. The licensing of pits to the private sector is a matter for British Coal in the light of its statutory duties.

Mr. Barron: Is the Minister aware that British Coal announced the closure of Kiveton colliery in my constituency in April, saying that it would offer it to the private sector in September when the current work force finishes? In April, British Coal stopped the development of three roadways which would have gone into new coal seams so that there might have been something worth buying in September.

British Coal is scuttling the collieries before they are offered to British Coal's so-called friends. Will the Minister stop that? Will he tell British Coal to take on some of the miners who worked in the headings, and who were sacked by British Coal in April, so that they can develop those coal faces? If that were to happen, the colliery might be seen as an economic unit that someone might want to run, rather than as a colliery which British Coal wants to shut and stop from providing jobs in my constituency.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman's wild allegations would carry rather more credibility if British Coal had not already leased and licensed seven pits. It is in advanced negotiation on two other pits and it is possible that we shall have 32 pits in operation early next year. That compares very favourably with any of the predictions made by Opposition Members.

Mr. Batiste: Does not my hon. Friend's comment about the prospect of 32 pits operating in the private sector in the near future vindicate the Government's decision that the future of coal lies in the private sector and that British industry is prepared to put its money where its mouth is to promote a profitable industry in the long term?

Mr. Eggar: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. With the private sector willing to invest in the future of British coal, it is important that we have a level of co-operation from the unions and the work force which guarantees success on a world-competitive basis.

Mr. Tipping: What steps does the Minister intend to take to ensure the fulfilment of his promises and those of his colleague the President of the Board of Trade that the work force and management will be in the pole position in any buy-out?

Mr. Eggar: We have made it absolutely clear that we welcome bids from employees and management. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we are making finance available to assist in those bids. However, we have also made it clear that any bids received from those sources must be judged on their merits in comparison with other bids.

Competitiveness

16. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next proposes to meet the Institute of Directors to discuss industrial competitiveness.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I maintain close contact with the Institute of Directors and discuss a wide range of issues, including industrial competitiveness.

Mr. Kynoch: Does my hon. Friend agree that British industry needs a stable economy with low interest rates, low inflation and a stable currency, particularly for exporting, alongside a flexible labour market? Does he further agree that the proposal to reintroduce secondary picketing or to sign up to the social chapter, as proposed by Labour Front-Bench Members in their fight to gain leadership of their party, would be a total disaster for the competitiveness of British industry?

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Certainly, one of the greatest advantages that British industry has derived from the Conservative Government in the past 15 years is the vastly improved state of industrial relations which has been the essential concomitant of the legislation that we have put through the House. We have better industrial relations figures today than at any time since the 1870s, but in many respects it is the 1870s to which the Labour party wishes to return in terms of legislation on industrial relations and trade unions.

Mr. Dalyell: As a Scot and a guinea pig for the poll tax, now that directors in Scotland say that they are horrified at the costs of local government reform which are coming through to them, what discussions have the Government had with directors and industrialists in England about their proposals for English local government reform? Let them be warned by what happened on the poll tax.

Mr. Hamilton: I think that the hon. Gentleman is labouring under the illusion that I am an Environment Minister.

Sir Michael Grylls: When does my hon. Friend expect to see completion of the internal market for telecommunications, gas and electricity? Britain could do extremely well if those markets were freed up.

Mr. Hamilton: That is one of the items at the top of our agenda in the European Community. At the Internal Market Council in Luxembourg last week, I participated in discussions which aimed to open up those markets. As my hon. Friend says, they offer huge opportunities for British business and we are well placed to take advantage of them; all that we need is the opportunity. I am pleased to say that this is one of the instances in which we and the Commission are at one.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the ludicrous nature of the Minister's reply, I wish to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Madam Speaker: As it was not the hon. Gentleman's substantive question, I cannot accept that point of order.

17. **Ms Armstrong:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received following the publication of his White Paper on competitiveness.

Mr. McLoughlin: The White Paper on competitiveness has been well received by a wide range of companies and trade associations.

Ms Armstrong: Is not the Minister expressing some complacency today, given yesterday's figures which show that the trade deficit between this country and countries outside the EC has doubled? Does that not demonstrate that the Government's policies of pushing skills down, opting for a low-skill economy and going from—*[Interruption.]* I wish to goodness that Conservative Members would tell the truth. A low-skill economy is not the way to make this country properly competitive. Does the Minister agree that we need a highly skilled work force to ensure that we really can compete effectively?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Lady says that she wishes that Conservative Members would reflect more truthfully what is going on. The hon. Lady has not reflected very well what is going on. This country has been exceedingly successful in attracting huge inward investment which is providing jobs—jobs which have also gone to the north-east. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would welcome that. *[Interruption.]* Apparently if it is not going to her constituency it does not matter—it is irrelevant. We are seeing huge inward investment into this country. If the hon. Lady's constituency cannot attract it, perhaps she should ask what her local authority is doing.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend think that a single European currency would make Britain more competitive, given that a single European currency as proposed by the Commission would require consequential increases in Community expenditure in terms of transfer payments between the richer and the poorer member states? As we have already learnt that a single monetary policy, as implemented through the exchange rate mechanism, made Britain uncompetitive, does my hon. Friend agree that a single currency would make Britain less competitive rather than more competitive?

Mr. McLoughlin: Not surprisingly, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in saying that the time to discuss that matter is when it is a proposition or even, possibly, a reality.

Companies House

18. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the registrar of companies in relation to the future status of Companies House.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Department is in regular close consultation with the Registrar of Companies on all issues relating to the future status of Companies House.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister agree that it is high time that the 900 or so staff working at Companies House in Cardiff were put out of their misery as they have had the sword of potential privatisation hanging over them for far too long? Does he also agree that there is a European Court of Justice ruling that one cannot make a profit out of a regulation function with regard to dealings with companies, and that it is therefore probably not legally possible to privatise Companies House? Is it not time that

the Government accepted that position and dropped all proposals to privatise this extremely important employer and regulator of British business?

Mr. Hamilton: I accept the point that continued uncertainty is undesirable and I will seek to resolve that uncertainty at the earliest possible moment. No decisions have yet been taken on the options, whether they be privatisation, contractorisation, management buy-out or any of the other options available. As to the impact of the European Court case, that is being closely studied.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that almost every Government owned and run organisation supposedly threatened with agency status or privatisation first resisted it and then, when it came about, found that it freed up the organisation to be of excellent service to the public? Indeed, it has been beneficial to all concerned.

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. What we are looking for here is improvements in efficiency to bring better value for money for the customer. In the past, privatisation or contractorisation has often produced significant advantages for employees as well as for the public at large.

Coal Industry

20. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent meetings he has had with the chairman of British Coal to discuss pit closures.

Mr. Eggar: Both my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I meet the chairman of British Coal as necessary to discuss a variety of coal industry matters.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not tragic to tour the coalfields of Britain—a once-proud industry—and see the decimation that has gone on over the past few years with hardly any pits left and the remaining ones having been privatised and taken over, with 250 men employed where perhaps 1,500 had been employed before? Does that not contrast sharply with the fact that when the President of the Board of Trade was asked last week on radio whether he wanted another job as chairman of the Tory party he said, "No, I want to keep my present job"? We should contrast that with position of the 31,000 miners he chucked on the scrap heap.

Mr. Eggar: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would learn to look forward, not backwards. I also wish that he would pay tribute to the work done by both central and local government to provide new opportunities for work, whether in the north-east, in Scotland, in Wales or in the central coalfield, and to the tremendous efforts made by many agencies to provide training and new jobs for miners.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real tragedy of the British coal mining industry is that it was not privatised many years earlier? Does he agree that if that had happened, working practices would now be much more up to date than they are, the stranglehold of the National Union of Mineworkers, which has done such immeasurable damage to the industry, would have been broken, the British coal industry would have been able to compete in the modern world and, as a result, many more pits would be open today?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend. One of the great tragedies of the coal industry is exactly that. If we are able to achieve the significant productivity improvements that we have achieved over the past year or two, why was it not possible to do that 10 years or 15 years ago? I have to tell the country and the House that a lot of the blame for that lies with the NUM in particular.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister explain why British Coal is closing down pits in this country and importing fuel and coal from abroad?

Mr. Eggar: One reason why we are importing coal is that we no longer have coking coal or anthracite in significant quantities. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members who know anything about the coal industry know perfectly well that that particular quality of coal has been virtually mined out over the past 200 years in this country. Opposition Members should also know that one of the major objectives of the private sector companies that have taken over the pits closed by British Coal is to provide coal to the industrial and domestic markets, which previously were not adequately competed for by British Coal.

Manufacturing Industry

23. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade maintains close contact with the CBI on a wide range of issues, including manufacturing industry.

Sir David Knox: When my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade next meets the president of the CBI, will he discuss with him the means of ensuring that manufacturing industry performs better in the next 20 years than it has in the past 20 years, during which manufacturing output has scarcely risen?

Mr. Eggar: One of my right hon. Friend's major objectives in the White Paper on competitiveness was to address some of the underlying issues relating to improving productivity and reducing costs throughout the British economy. I think that my hon. Friend will agree with me that the White Paper is an important statement which has been welcomed throughout the trade associations and by the CBI, and that it points the way forward.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I shall come to the hon. Gentlemen after I have made a short statement, which is about the grouping of oral questions.

Oral Questions

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: On 23 February the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) raised a point of order asking whether it would be possible for the House as a whole to be informed which oral questions were to be grouped. This has been examined by the Procedure Committee in its fifth report, which was published last week. The Committee recommended that a provisional list, not only of groupings of oral questions but of questions unstarred or withdrawn, should be placed in a Division Lobby before the House sits. I propose to implement this recommendation.

Accordingly, with effect from the beginning of next week, a typed list of questions grouped, unstarred or withdrawn before 12 noon will be placed in the No Lobby by 1 o'clock. I would stress that this list can only be provisional since it is, of course, possible to unstar or withdraw a question right up until the time it is called. Nevertheless, I hope that this new arrangement will be of assistance to hon. Members.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Madam Speaker, may I raise a point of order of which I have given your Office notice, namely, whether the term Lord Haw-Haw is an acceptable parliamentary term as applied to those with whom one has a difference of opinion?

Madam Speaker: I try to deal with matters as they arise and not to allow contention to run into the following day. However, the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I do not consider that that is a parliamentary term which should be used in the House. I expect Members to exercise good temper in their exchanges here and to use moderate language in the Chamber. I deprecate what was said yesterday in the exchange to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your protection once again for Back Benchers against the arrogance of Ministers.

This morning, in Manchester, the Minister for Roads and Traffic made an announcement about my constituency. I was told the detail of that announcement by the press. Last night the press was informed and this morning the rest of the media were informed. Indeed, one Conservative Member of Parliament was informed this morning. I received notification at 12 o'clock. I believe that that is outrageous and that when one Back Bencher is treated in such a way, the whole House is treated in such a way. I seek your protection for all Back Benchers.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I am concerned to ensure that the House as a whole is informed when important statements are made. Of course, it is for Ministers to decide whether they do that from the Dispatch Box or by means of a written answer. In my view, if the announcement affected the hon. Gentleman's constituency, he should certainly have been informed before the media were informed.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following your helpful announcement about questions—I realise that this is a matter partly for you and partly for the Procedure Committee—may I suggest that the final helpful step, in the age of technology when we have annunciators, would be to relay the information to the House as and when questions are withdrawn during the day, even up to 2.15 or 2.30 pm?

Madam Speaker: That would not be as easy as it sounds, but I understand that the matter is being looked into.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is there any way in which we can thank the servants of this House and the other staff who have struggled in today, in defiance of the rail strike?

Madam Speaker: That is certainly not a point of order. I am sure that Members have also struggled in, and I am happy to see so many of them here.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understood that, when Front-Bench spokesmen visited one's constituency, it was normally a courtesy to write to the hon. Member concerned. Will you rule on the visits of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen to our constituencies without affording us the courtesy that the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) requires?

Madam Speaker: Irrespective of whether they are Front-Bench or Back-Bench Members, when one Member visits another's constituency, it is a courtesy to tell that Member that he or she will be there.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This morning, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee published a report condemning the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for refusing to allow it to commission a confidential attitude survey of civil servants. Will you rule on whether the Minister has any right to refuse to allow it to carry out such a survey? The Select Committee is entitled to summon the same civil servants to give evidence before it, if it so wishes, but is apparently not permitted to write to them.

As both Departments of State and trade unions frequently carry out surveys of their staff and members —on their morale and attitudes—why should not a Select Committee of this House be empowered to carry out exactly the same type of survey when it is strictly relevant to its functions? Is not that clearly an arbitrary abuse of power by the Minister to cover his embarrassment? Will you rule on whether an action of that type is a breach of the privilege of this House?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman is contending that a breach of privilege has taken place, he must write to me. I was prepared to deal with his point of order, but now that he has raised an issue of privilege I must ask him to send me the full details in writing.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: There can hardly be anything further as I now have a matter of privilege to deal with. If the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) writes to me, I will deal with the matter as one of privilege.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A moment ago you said that it was

a courtesy for hon. Members visiting other constituencies to write to the Member concerned. When you said so, I heard an Opposition Member—I am not sure who it was—say, "No way." Do you think that the House should be doing anything to enforce that, and perhaps you could advise me—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not in favour of a great many rules and regulations and of dotting the i's and crossing the t's. I have just celebrated 21 years in this House— [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".] Whenever I have visited another Member's constituency—no matter what party he or she belongs to—I have let that Member know. That is a good standard, and I would like other Members to follow that example.

Mr. Riddick *rose—*

Madam Speaker: That is all I have to say on the matter.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 8 JULY

Members successful in the ballot were:
Ms Joyce Quin
Mr. Michael Stephen
Mr. Peter Hain

BILL PRESENTED

CONTAMINATED LAND (REMEDIATION)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth, supported by Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, Mr. Jim Cunningham, Ms Estelle Morris, Mr. Jon Owen Jones, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Ms Anne Coffey, Mr. Robert Litherland, Mr. George Howarth and Mr. Harry Barnes, presented a Bill to make provision for the improved clean-up of contaminated land: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 July, and to be printed. [Bill 130.]

Identity Cards

3.38 pm

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for a national identity card scheme, and for connected purposes.

I congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your 21st anniversary.

There is overwhelming public support for the idea of a national identity card. Millions of people were accustomed to carrying national registration cards before their abolition in 1952, and the citizens of most other European democracies carry national identity cards. In this country today, millions of people possess a range of different cards which identify them for a variety of purposes. There is nothing alien, sinister or fundamentally un-British about the concept of an identity card.

The Bill is very simple, and merely requires the Government to co-ordinate a national identity card scheme. It does not state that possession of a national identity card should be compulsory or even specify the circumstances in which its possession would be required, although I shall suggest some areas where that would not be unreasonable.

A national identity card scheme could be entirely self-financing and, far from being a threat to civil liberties, would be positive enhancement of them. The Government currently issue a number of identity documents to individual citizens for various purposes. Apart from the passport—which, incidentally, is self-financing—the most obvious of those is the driving licence, which is issued to some 32 million people. It contains a large amount of personal information, but as proof of the identity of the bearer it is virtually useless, and it is often used fraudulently in mainland Britain.

In Northern Ireland—where the driving licence contains a photograph—their fraudulent use is much less widespread. It is not surprising that the Government are actively considering the inclusion of photographs and possibly also fingerprints in such documents. After all, there seems to be little point in issuing documents which purport to identify the bearer if they are patently unable to do so.

There is currently a similar need to update and replace the British visitors passport, as the Home Affairs Select Committee recently recommended and as has been recently demonstrated by one of our EC partners, Spain, which has said that it will no longer recognise it in the future. It seems clear that there is a window of opportunity for the Government to use new technology to create an identity card which would be of enormous value to individual citizens, the Government and private sector organisations.

I am sure that what we need, and what would catch the public's imagination, is a national identity card based on smart card technology. Smart cards are extremely difficult to forge. They are the size of a credit card, but can store images of palm prints, fingerprints, eye retina patterns and photographs, as well as a large volume of other information. They can also ensure that the data is separated and can be accessed only by a series of different codes.

It would thus be possible that an identity card, driving licence or passport could also contain entirely separate banking, medical and social security information if, and only if, an individual chose to store it there. The advantage

[Mr. Harold Elletson]

obviously would be that, instead of carrying a wallet full of cards, an individual need carry only one. It would be a secure and convenient system which would be much more difficult to use fraudulently, and would in fact soon virtually wipe out credit card fraud and theft.

I am surprised that Opposition Members apparently appear intent on opposing the motion, since it is primarily designed to stamp out credit card fraud and theft. That is not an insignificant consideration because it is primarily as a means of combating fraud, rather than other types of crime, that a national identity card scheme is necessary. The police currently admit privately that more than 200,000 plastic cards are lost or stolen every week. Card fraud cost banks £192 million in 1992, which is three times as much as in 1989.

Many banks are now considering the possibility of introducing laser-etched photographs into their cards. The Royal Bank of Scotland recently had a pilot scheme which showed that it was a highly effective way of tackling fraud. The scheme cut the bank's losses through fraud by 98.9 per cent. in 1993. I believe that the Government should now be working with the banks to develop an identity card scheme which would be mutually beneficial.

There is no doubt that the Government also are losing billions of pounds every year through fraud of one sort or another, much of it due to false identity. Social security fraud costs the taxpayer £4 billion every year. The savings which the Benefits Agency was recently able to achieve of £558 million in 1992-93 and £654 million in 1993-94 are merely the tip of the iceberg. It is hardly surprising that the Government are losing so much, given that only recently it was revealed that unemployment benefit had been successfully claimed by M. Mouse, D. Duck, S. Stallone and, I believe, J. Major.

It is clearly nonsensical that that sort of widespread organised fraud, in both public and private sectors, should take place largely because of false identities. Credit and cheque-card fraud should be dealt with alongside social security fraud, by the Government in partnership with the banks. The Government should insist that all benefit claimants provide proper proof of identity by participating in a recognised national identity card scheme. Ordinary citizens should be able to rely on a secure banking system that protects them from forgery and fraud. There is no infringement of civil liberties in that; it is simple common sense. Decent people are fed up with paying criminals to defraud the system, and it is time that we stopped doing so.

While I am sure that the major advantage of a national identity card scheme would be the elimination of fraud, it would have other significant benefits, even if it were purely voluntary. For example, landlords would be able effectively to check the identity of short-term tenants, thus contributing significantly to the prevention of terrorism.

I do not accept that the costs need be prohibitive. In fact, I am sure that the scheme would be self-financing—not just because of the well-known generosity of the clearing banks, which might be expected to participate, but because of the substantial savings to the Treasury that would be achieved.

The Bill is not about restricting the freedom of the individual; it is about enhancing it. I do not see how anyone, particularly Opposition Members, can object to a voluntary scheme of this type on "civil liberties" grounds. After all, which of us here would be prepared to stand up and say that he would fight for the crimes of the fraudster to go undetected, or allow the terrorist to continue to go about his murderous business hidden behind a cloak of false identity for fear of abusing his civil liberties? Our concern should be not with the civil liberties of fraudsters and terrorists, but with their victims; not with the rights of con men and criminals, but with the security of decent, law-abiding people.

We are now faced with the need to tackle crime, fraud and abuse of trust, not because the Government wish to monitor or limit the movement of our citizens but because criminals have impinged on our natural assumption that all our citizens are decent and honest. Unlike the infamous three-card trick, in which the con man always wins, this one card—a national card—will ensure that the winner is the decent British citizen.

3.47 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I shall be brief, because I do not want to impinge on the time allowed for the important debate that follows; nor, however, do I want the complacent statements of the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) to go unanswered.

The hon. Gentleman slipped very easily into talking of a voluntary scheme, and trying to avoid the costs of a national identity card scheme. According to an answer given to me by his colleagues in the Home Office, setting up such a system would cost £475 million, while the annual cost of running it would be between £50 million and £100 million. Those are huge sums, and I am sure that we can all think of much better ways of spending the money.

Many of the arguments being advanced about the ease of running such a scheme are similar to the arguments about the ease of running the community charge, or poll tax. We were told that that, too, would be a simple scheme that would commend itself to all concerned. What we encountered, however, was one of the problems that any identity card scheme would pose. In reply to a question to the Department of the Environment, I was told that there was a 34 per cent. annual turnover in the community charge register across the country. When I checked with my own borough, Sandwell—a fairly stable community—I found that it had a 40 per cent. turnover. Then there are the inner London boroughs. Camden, for instance, has a 60 per cent. turnover—and its turnover is not one of the highest. Those figures come from the Department of the Environment. That is the level of change that would take place, so many of the advantages of identifying and keeping track of people start to fall down.

The hon. Gentleman claimed that social security fraud would be a main target. He should have taken note of the words of a Minister in the other place, who said that the problem was not false identity but false statements of a person's circumstances. The hon. Gentleman mentioned terrorists. Another Minister said that he could not recall a terrorist offence that would not have taken place had people been required to carry identity cards. The same applies to burglary. I doubt whether the average burglar will pack his ID card when he goes out to commit an offence.

The proposed measure is a gimmick. It is an attempt by Conservative Members and the Government to reassure ordinary citizens that they are doing something about the problems that concern people so widely. Such matters can

be dealt with in other ways. Further checks should be undertaken to deal with social security fraud and, on income tax, it would have helped if the Government had not encouraged the explosion of self-employment and the massive fraud that has taken place in exemption certificates —*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman believes that income tax exemption certificates can be counterfeited, how can he not believe that identity cards could be duplicated, resulting in fraud?

The Bill is no answer to dealing with many of those problems. It would be a leap in the dark and enormously expensive. That is why it should be opposed.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 89, Noes 113.

Division No. 271] **[3.51 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Ashby, David
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Batiste, Spencer
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Churchill, Mr
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Flynn, Paul
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hendron, Dr Joe
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marland, Paul
Mates, Michael
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Wavaney)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spink, Dr Robert
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Michael
Sumberg, David
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Sykes and
Mr. Andrew Robathan.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Barnes, Harry
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Question accordingly negatived.

OPPOSITION DAY

[14TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Overseas Aid and Development

4.2 pm

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister. I have also had to limit speeches between the hours of 6 pm and 8 pm to 10 minutes, because of the number of Members who wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I beg to move,

That this House notes the projected decline in aid to developing countries, in real terms, over the next two years, the failure to target aid on those in greatest need, highlighted by the Pergau Dam affair, the failure to respond adequately to emergencies such as the current holocaust in Rwanda and the absence of any clear, co-ordinated strategy for promoting effective and sustainable development that benefits the poorest people in developing countries, and assists those countries in dealing with the problems caused by debt repayments and adverse terms of trade; and calls on the Government to bring forward a White Paper on Overseas Development at the earliest opportunity.

Had you, Madam Speaker, selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), I would have had no difficulty in endorsing it as well.

I address the House on this issue having had the experience of two visits to the African continent in the past two months. On those visits I saw the two dimensions of African development and the two sides of the issues that we must deal with today. In South Africa, in common with many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I witnessed at first hand the triumphs of non-racial democratic change in a rich, beautiful but much-divided country.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Looking though the list of Opposition Supply days over the past year, I notice that it is just under a year since the Opposition chose this subject for debate. I also notice that in that time there has been no debate on an Opposition Supply day on the subjects of unemployment or economic policy. Could the hon. Gentleman tell the House why?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention does not relate to the motion for today's debate. We are dealing with overseas aid. His question might be asked at some other time, but it does not relate to the subject on the Order Paper.

Mr. Clarke: As always, Madam Speaker, your wisdom contrasts with the absurdity of the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

The peaceful transition in South Africa from apartheid to democracy was important not just for South Africa—it is an example, an inspiration and a source of hope for the continent as a whole. However, just a few weeks after my visit there I saw for myself the carnage resulting from the genocidal war in Rwanda. Seeing what is happening in those two countries concentrated my mind on how well and effectively the United Kingdom is responding both to changes for the better and for the worse in the developing world.

I can think of no subject more important to debate than our concern about poverty at home and abroad. Those who ignore that challenge do so at their peril. In South Africa, investment in the economic and social infrastructure will be critical for the survival and success of a new democratic society. Britain, the former colonial power which found little difficulty in continuing to trade with apartheid South Africa when she was ostracised by the rest of the world, is prepared to offer only £100 million for development assistance. That is a third of the amount that was squandered on the Pergau dam project. We can already see from the example of Gaza and Jericho in the middle east that even the best peace process in the world will falter if it is not backed by sufficient funds.

I am delighted that even if these issues take up a whole Opposition day they will enable us to debate the important question of Rwanda, which is at last being raised in the House. The international community's political will to act, the effective delivery of protection and relief for the millions who fled their homes, and urgent programmes of assistance for neighbouring countries are relevant and profound. Britain has delivered none of the things that are essential for a speedy solution to the problems there. Should he catch your eye, Madam Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) will speak about the role of the United Nations and its agencies.

There are two points to be made about Rwanda. First, the 1948 United Nations charter said that we would never stand aside from genocide. But that is exactly what is happening today before our very eyes. Secondly, it is disgraceful that Britain agreed to the withdrawal of most of the United Nations force, limited though it was, from Rwanda when the presence of that force would have been most valuable and especially during the days of dreadful slaughter that followed the death of the president on 6 April.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Will the hon. Gentleman admit that, according to the Secretary-General, those troops were withdrawn because their mandate did not allow them to intervene to stop the carnage? They did not depart saying, "We are not interested", but because they had no mandate from the Security Council to take the action that many of us would like to see.

Mr. Clarke: I have a high regard for the hon. Gentleman on these issues, but I think he will agree that, sadly, the mandate has been changed time after time. It is also sad that it has not reflected the political will—nor the military will—to deal with carnage and genocide in that country. If we had only a fraction of the will which we saw in the Gulf war and the Falklands, the British people could hold their heads up high.

What we require now—I spell it out so that there may be no doubt—is not the dispatch of troops from western Europe; we need full logistical support for the African troops by the United Nations and a more substantial British contribution to humanitarian aid.

Unless there is any doubt, let me make it plain on behalf of the Opposition that we regard the French initiative as being fraught with difficulty, if only because clearly there are grave questions about their neutrality in Africa. We want the United Nations' impact to be effective, worth while and supported by Great Britain and the western nations in terms of the necessary equipment.

I turn to the impact of the carnage on neighbouring countries, some of which I have recently visited. Serious problems exist in Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Burundi and the potential for an explosion is sad in the extreme.

Let us reflect on the international community's inability to deal with the genocide in Rwanda. A few weeks ago, I visited Uganda and in particular south Uganda on the borders of Rwanda and Zaire. It was an extremely distressing experience. The local paper in Kampala, *The Sunday Vision*, greeted me with the headline:

"Rwanda: 1 million feared killed".

I do not know whether the figures are accurate, but I know that genocide is taking place and that we should be doing something about it.

I saw too, sadly, the dramatic evidence of 40,000 bodies floating in Lake Victoria. I saw the efforts of the local people to provide mass graves, in one case for 2,700 people. I saw how inadequate were the resources in their excellent attempts to respond and I saw the refugee camp in Kisoro, where more than 5,000 people sought to exist. Many of the children were in tattered rags, their parents pleading, begging for water, for food and for blankets for the cold evenings and I regretted that I saw no British presence there.

If there were 40,000 bodies floating in the Thames or the Clyde, we would rightly proclaim it as a national disaster; we would have said that we did not have the infrastructure to deal with it—nor do the neighbouring states, particularly Uganda.

In an earlier visit to Uganda, accompanied by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, I saw the evidence of the impact of AIDS. There were thousands of orphans looking after orphans, and grandparents looking after 15 or 16 children, with the questions unanswered as to what happens next. I saw, too, in Uganda the evidence of 16 districts suffering heavily from famine, with people already dying. This must be known to the ODA. Britain had contributed to two of those 16 regions.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): When the hon. Gentleman was out there, did he have the opportunity of visiting Zaire? When I visited there, I found that the president had just spent £18 million on a new palace for himself.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My hon. Friend was talking about Uganda.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No, he was talking about other countries as well. Zaire spent only £1 million a year on the national health service. That is why Zaire is a centre for AIDS, which is spreading to the rest of Africa.

Mr. Clarke: I do not want to score political points—an easy thing to do—in such a serious debate. If what the hon. Lady says is true, I deplore it. I am willing to listen to her evidence, as I hope she is willing to listen to mine. I shall deal with the general point she raised later, when I hope that I shall command her support.

I referred to 16 districts where famine is firmly and clearly established, yet Britain contributed to only two—Soroti and Kumi. The newspaper that I mentioned published photographs of emaciated and starving children in Teso and Karamoja. I am trying to be fair, but when I visited that area I was given to understand that not one penny had been received from the ODA, which is wholly unacceptable.

It must be said that the Government's response to these matters has been lethargic in the extreme. Neighbouring countries have to deal with difficult domestic issues day after day and they are not helped by the problem of international debt. That issue is rightly dealt with in each of our overseas development debates and I would welcome debating it today. Uganda spends 30 per cent. of its income servicing the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and other commercial interests.

Of course, the problem is far wider than that. In 1992, developing countries repaid £100 billion interest on their debts, well over twice the amount they received in aid. I hope that we hear no more of the nonsense that charity begins at home, when clearly our international institutions are exploiting former colonial territories.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way. Was not a great deal of the debt to which he referred incurred in building grandiose industrial projects during the 1960s and 1970s? Has he seen the recent World bank report, which shows that the developing countries that followed market-oriented policies have done a great deal better than those that followed the policies of centrally planned economies, nationalisation and socialism? It is the countries that followed the latter policies which have incurred huge debts. That should raise some question in the minds of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends about the effectiveness of socialist policies in general.

Mr. Clarke: I have certainly seen the recent World bank report. If the hon. Gentleman spares himself the time to go to the Library and read it, he will find little support for his proposition.

The Government's tepid amendment to our motion suggests that we should deal with the issue of debt—so flippantly dealt with by the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim)—on the Trinidad terms. No doubt the Minister will refer to that—*[Interruption.]* I should be happy to give way to any Conservative Member who wishes to intervene. Their attempts to disrupt the order of the House, especially in such a debate, are quite unacceptable.

The Trinidad terms proposed by the Prime Minister, which are mentioned clearly in the Government's amendment, were to write off two thirds of bilateral aid, while the terms offered so far have been a 50 per cent. write-off at best. Even the full Trinidad terms would not begin to deal with the problem. Do the Government deny the findings of the World bank report in February, to which the hon. Member for Amber Valley referred? In case the hon. Gentleman has forgotten, I remind him and the House that it stated:

"Only six of the twenty-one severely indebted low-income, sub-Saharan African countries could achieve a sustainable position even with the"

full Trinidad terms,

"while nine would still have a"

debt service ratio

"in excess of 300 per cent. of exports."

The Trinidad terms do nothing to help countries faced with enormous debts to multilateral bodies such as the World bank and the IMF. While Ministers dwell on the extremely limited success of the Trinidad terms, severely indebted countries continue to accumulate fresh arrears that are greater than the debts written off.

If the Government have no fresh initiatives, we can only conclude that they have no strategy for dealing with the debt crisis facing the world's poorest countries. Will the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office or

[Mr. Clarke]

the Minister who replies to the debate say whether the Government are prepared to take any new initiative to aid relief on a multilateral or bilateral debt?

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Does the hon. Gentleman deny that, following the initiative taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the Trinidad terms, the Government have so far cancelled £1 billion of debt from the poorest countries?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I reported the views of the World bank, and not many people would argue that it is the most progressive of bodies. It acknowledges the limitations of the Trinidad terms in a way that the House will recognise.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does not that £1 billion contrast unfavourably with the fact that, over the past few years, the Tory Government have written off £5,000 million of debts for the top four clearing banks —National Westminster, Midland, Lloyds and Barclays? [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] If that kind of money were used to help developing countries, much of the misery that my hon. Friend saw on his travels would be removed.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. Since I entered the House in 1982, I have found that he has shown far greater interest in third-world matters than Conservative Members who have been interrupting.

As to the Government's record on overseas aid—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, but as I have been particularly generous in giving way so far, I hope that the House will then allow me to continue my speech.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I was a member of the European Parliament's development committee, as was my husband. I have visited the countries in question and take a considerable interest in them. What concerns me about the Trinidad terms is that we have kept our part of the bargain but that other countries have not. We have not enjoyed the full benefit of the Trinidad terms.

Mr. Clarke: I wish that were the case. Any examination of the Trinidad terms shows that what Britain has offered so far falls far short of what was promised by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister—but that will come as no surprise to the House.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while the Government parade around the world their supposed help with debt, they have done nothing but undermine the real prices paid for commodities to countries that are trying to get out of debt in the first place? Far from growing, many African economies are getting smaller because of the reduced prices paid for vital commodities.

Mr. Clarke: I could not agree more, as is shown by the evidence in African countries that I visited. Uganda, for example, to deal with the problem of falling commodity prices, has been compelled to introduce health service and education charges which hon. Members on both sides of the House would find unacceptable for Great Britain.

Let us consider the Government's record on overseas aid. The House recognises the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent., which we are told all parties in the House claim they are committed to achieving. Under Labour, we had reached 0.51 per cent., more than three quarters of the UN target, and it was increasing. Under this Government, our contribution has been reduced to a pathetic 0.31 per cent., which is less than half the UN target in 1992. The figures for 1993—

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will not give way again. Conservative Members should be patient. I have been particularly generous so far.

The figures for 1993 are likely to be no better. The figures for this year and next year are likely to be even worse. In 1979, Britain was the largest donor of the G7 nations and the most generous of the world's richest countries. We have now fallen to fifth place out of seven, a record of which the Conservative party can hardly be proud. From being one of the leaders in development, we are increasingly becoming one of the also-rans.

As well as considerably reducing the volume of British aid, the Government have changed the way in which aid is divided up. Eighteen months ago at the Edinburgh summit, the Prime Minister committed himself to very large increases in European Union aid. The consequence of that, without an increase in resources, must be cuts in the bilateral budget, cuts in the Overseas Development Agency itself, cuts in our support for the UN and UN agencies such as UNICEF and cuts in respect of other multilateral agencies such as the World bank's development wing, the International Development Association.

As the House will know, negotiations for the next replenishment of IDA funds will begin later this year. Consequently, I want to ask the Government and the two Ministers who will be involved in the debate a specific question about the 11th replenishment. Will they cut our percentage contribution, or will they make a commitment to no further cuts?

Last year, the Government abolished the separate Budget headings for aid to developing countries and assistance to eastern Europe. Aid to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is increasing from £188 million in 1992-93 to £331 million in 1995-96. Promises that that would not be at the expense of developing countries have, in our experience, simply proved to be hollow. Of course, there is a need for assistance to eastern Europe, but not at the expense of even poorer people elsewhere. It cannot be right that sub-Saharan Africa, where less than half the children receive education, should lose out to eastern Europe, where literacy is almost 100 per cent.

We move our motion in the knowledge that world poverty in the modern age is entirely unacceptable. We see it as one of the greatest challenges of our time and as a threat to peace. I do not apologise for asking for a crusade against world poverty. We must tell ourselves that it simply cannot be right that 80 per cent. of the world's resources are consumed by 20 per cent. of the world's population. We cannot be complacent about the fact that every year an additional 26 million people, equivalent to almost half the population of Britain, experience absolute poverty.

When I was elected to the House in the early 1980s, our debates on the subject tended to be dominated—and rightly so—by the Brandt report. The response to that report included two massive lobbies, amounting to 30,000 people, to the House in the 1980s. That led to the Commission, after other international reaction, publishing a second report, entitled "A Common Crisis". In his introduction to the second report, the late Willy Brandt said:

"Every two seconds of this year a child will die of hunger or disease. And no statistic can express what it is to see even one child die . . . to see the uncomprehending panic in eyes which are the clear and lucid eyes of a child."

I believed then that that is why we place such emphasis on poverty and why we have a duty to do so today.

More than 60 per cent. of the populations of the least developed countries are living in absolute poverty. That is not reflected in the present priorities of the Government's aid programme. Targeting the poor means not only delivering aid to the poorest countries of the world, but making sure that aid is delivered to the poorest people within those countries.

In order to focus aid programmes on reducing poverty, we need to know how our aid is being spent. I welcome the introduction of the policy information marker system, or PIMS, which identifies what proportion of the ODA budget is allocated to each of the Department's seven objectives, but frankly it does not go far enough. Despite PIMS, the Government still do not know how much of their aid is reducing poverty. They still have no idea of who actually benefits from British taxpayers' money.

I give one example. In another place last year, Baroness Chalker said that about 30 per cent. of our bilateral aid was spent on the basic needs of health care and education. This year's ODA report said that the proportion spent on education alone was 17 per cent. But if we want to know how much aid was spent on improving basic education for children and adults in order to reduce poverty, those figures are no help at all. The reality is that less than 6 per cent. of education spending in the aid budget in 1991-92 was spent on primary and adult basic education.

If we want our aid to focus on reducing poverty, it is those aspects that matter most. In particular, we should make a greater contribution to the education of women and girls. Female education is one of the most important commitments that a developing country can make to its future. Those policies must clearly be viewed as essential in the long term—for example, nutrition, family planning, child health and women's rights are profoundly affected by whether a country educates its girls. I do not believe that we have established a priority in that respect. It is still the case that, in sub-Saharan Africa, only 40 per cent. of girls receive any form of education, and in south-east Asia the figure is only 53 per cent. Our education aid budget should address such issues, but, frankly, it does not.

In a speech to the Overseas Development Institute last week, which I attended, Baroness Chalker made much of how the ODA could teach others how to improve their aid programmes. For example, she said that the European Union could learn from us about focusing aid on poverty reduction. Perhaps we should take a leaf out of the book of the World bank. Since 1991, the development wing of the bank has assessed all its development projects according to their impact on poverty. The programme of targeting interventions, or PTI, gives priority to projects that are specifically targeted at those living in absolute poverty and to projects that have a general benefit for the community, but, rightly, a disproportionately high level of benefit for the poor.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because I know of his genuine interest in these matters.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, regardless of whether the World bank focuses on poverty, there is a substantial problem with regard to World bank debt—that countries such as Uganda must pay as much as one third of their total revenue in the repayment of debt to the World bank? Will the hon. Gentleman encourage the World bank to suspend that debt to help such countries to improve their economies?

Mr. Clarke: I recognise the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. If he had been here earlier, he would have heard me make precisely that point.

If the World bank can deal with projects which have a genuine benefit to the community but which rightly discriminate disproportionately in terms of benefit to the poor, I see no reason why the ODA cannot do the same. I ask the Government a specific question: will they introduce in their development programme a system of monitoring or targeting to reduce poverty, such as the one which they agreed to the World bank adopting three years ago? Frankly, that would not have gone through if the British had not agreed to it.

It is also clear that if we are to achieve poverty reduction in our aid programme, we must involve the poor themselves. Participation of local people at all stages of projects is absolutely crucial. That includes consultation on suitability, research and design. If we are serious about helping people to escape poverty by their own efforts, it is manifestly essential that we take their views seriously when it comes to designing projects. I have a further question for the Minister: what proportion of the ODA's bilateral projects involve participation of local communities at the design stage, and what are the Government's plans to increase that?

To improve the quality of aid and to achieve a proper poverty focus also requires more openness and accountability in the Government's decision-making process. Last week, Baroness Chalker said that this was also an area where the ODA—as she put it—already excelled. I find that hard to accept. If we had an open and accountable decision-making process, a decision such as that on Pergau would never have been approved.

If Baroness Chalker meant that the Government would learn the lessons of Pergau, and that one of the lessons of Pergau is the need for disclosure of information, that is all well and good and we welcome that repentance. If that is what the Government mean, presumably they will agree to make project information available to interested parties when a project is in preparation. They will also agree that after a project has been approved, the appraisals of its effectiveness should be made public after any confidential information has been omitted. I therefore ask the Government a further question: will they support the release of project information documents and project appraisal documents for all the development initiatives funded by the ODA?

[Mr. Clarke]

In making these proposals to improve the work of the ODA, I do not in any way understate the tremendous commitment and high quality of the people who serve in the development field. Indeed, one of the main purposes of bringing forward the debate is to protect and strengthen those who work in the ODA and whose influence extends elsewhere. I am afraid that that does not always appear to be the priority of Ministers.

As part of the ideologically driven interference by the Tory party in the work of the Department, I understand that a new approach to project preparation and management has been introduced. It comes all the way from the United States of America and is inspired by an organisation with the title of Team Technologies Incorporated. I have here the job description for the post of project preparation facilitator, which was introduced into the ODA under this exciting new initiative. Hon. Members will be delighted to learn that one of the requirements for the post is proven capacity

"to communicate orally very effectively and with enthusiasm, bilaterally and in the training room."

In other words, the ability to talk. With leadership like that, we can see that the future of Britain's reputation in development will be safe in their hands.

However, development is a serious subject. It is a very serious matter that the Government have admitted that they tolerated a linkage between British aid expenditure and the sale of arms. It is a serious matter that thousands of the world's children are killed or severely disabled every year by the many millions of land mines that have been laid in developing countries in the past 30 years. It is a very serious matter that the Government continue to equivocate on the issue of land mine exports, even though the ODA recognises that land mines are one of the greatest obstacles to post-war reconstruction in developing countries. Therefore, it is with the utmost seriousness that I call on the Government urgently to review their policy on land mines and to give the highest priority to the protection of innocent men, women and children.

It is also extremely serious that the latest reports from Ethiopia suggest that that country is about to face a famine even more severe than that of 1984-85. I welcome today's announcement of a further 20,000 tonnes of food aid to Ethiopia, although its timing is extremely interesting. However, the number of people at risk is between 6 million and 7 million and a much larger response from the whole international community to the impending crisis in Ethiopia is clearly required. Therefore, I ask the Government what more they intend to do and what steps they intend to take to secure an adequate response from the European Union as a whole.

I referred earlier to Willy Brandt's introduction to the important and moving document, practical though it was, "A Common Crisis". I conclude with his conclusion. He said:

"A new century nears, and with it the prospects of a new civilization. Could we not begin to lay the basis for that new community with reasonable relations among all people and nations, and to build a world in which sharing, justice and freedom, and peace prevail?"

That is why we challenge poverty wherever it exists. It is an evil whether it is in Britain or overseas. We will fight poverty for all we are worth and fight injustices wherever they occur. To do that, we need a strategy for the future of British development policy such as only a White Paper can provide. That is why I commend our motion to the House.

4.43 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'supports the Government's clear strategy to support sustainable economic and social development, particularly in the poorest countries; commends the lead the Prime Minister has taken through his Trinidad Terms initiative, from which 22 countries now benefit, to reduce the debt burden of developing countries; welcomes the role played by the Government in the successful conclusion of the GATT Uruguay round, which will improve trading opportunities for developing countries and help them generate more of the resources they need for their development; commends its substantial and effective aid programme and in particular the use it makes of the expertise of British institutions, companies and non-governmental organisations; and welcomes the fact that the Government now publishes more information about the aid programme than ever before.'.

I am grateful to the Opposition, and to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), for giving the House the opportunity to discuss this very important matter this afternoon. The Government's policy towards developing countries is clear and straightforward: to help them to help themselves. We believe that it is right to use a portion of the country's wealth to help poorer countries and that it is strongly in our interests as a major trading nation that there should be greater stability and prosperity in the developing world.

Long-term economic growth and good government are central to achieving that stability. The past few decades have shown that sensible economic policies can produce economic growth. Bad policies lead to economic stagnation and decline, with countries unable to provide for their growing populations. Good government, too, is vital; efficient and accountable government with respect for human rights.

I endorse what the hon. Member for Monklands, West said about South Africa and the recent elections there. They are a milestone in the march towards a free and non-racial democratic society.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Can my right hon. Friend say whether there is any way in which we shall be able to turn that into tangible form? One obviously endorses entirely his sentiments, but now that we have the new South Africa, will we be able to manifest that, as it were?

Mr. Goodlad: There are important challenges and South Africans will look to their friends in the international community to help dismantle the apartheid legacy and rebuild the country. The South African Government's reconstruction and development programme provides the basis for that. Our aid since 1979 has been a demonstration of our commitment to help the transition process. For example, we have trained more than 1,000 non-white South Africans a year for their rightful role in government and society. The present South Africa can count on our support for sound policies.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on 4 May that we expected to provide £100 million of aid over the next three years. Our objectives will include good governance, including public administration and police reform, education, health and the promotion of small

businesses. We hope to build on the work that we have already done. In addition, investment by the private sector is crucial to sustainable economic growth. We are already discussing the priorities for aid with the new Government and we shall continue to work with South African non-governmental organisations where appropriate.

On a personal basis, having done voluntary service overseas in South Africa in the early 1960s, I am glad to see VSO back in South Africa and that normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

The House will recognise what progress there has been in the developing world as a whole. During the 25 years to 1990, GDP growth in low and middle income countries was almost 5 per cent. per year. The growth in per capita incomes was almost 2.5 per cent. At that rate of growth, per capita incomes double in 30 years. The United Nations development programme's human development index rose from 25 per cent. in 1960 to 60 per cent. in 1992. Other achievements have helped to improve the living standards of people in developing countries. A dramatic improvement in agricultural yields and in adequate food supply has led to the virtual elimination of famine in south Asia and China.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 1965 only about 25 countries met their daily per capita calorie requirements. By 1990, that figure had doubled to 50. There has been significant progress in improving health. In the past three decades, average life expectancy in developing countries has increased from 51 to 64 years.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned UNDP and talked about poor people's basic needs. Can he explain why, according to UNDP, only 6.6 per cent. of British overseas aid is focused on poor people's basic needs of clean water, health care, primary school education and so on, whereas Denmark manages to focus 25 per cent. of its overseas aid on poor people's basic needs? Why is the United Kingdom's overseas aid programme skewed so that it focuses so little of its aid on those needs?

Mr. Goodlad: I will come to the question of poverty a little later. Britain has one of the best records—among the OECD's Development Assistance Committee donors—of allocating aid to the poorest countries. In each of the past five years, between 80 per cent. and 85 per cent. of our bilateral aid which is allocatable by income group has been spent in low-income countries—those with an income per capita of less than $765.

The British aid programme tackles poverty at all levels: the direct poverty reduction level, often with our partners in non-governmental organisations; and the sectoral level, with aid to improve reforms, to help with education and water supplies, with humanitarian aid and with aid for broader policy and institutional reforms, which help to bring faster, broad-based, labour-intensive growth with widespread benefits for poor people

The rate of infant mortality has nearly halved. Since 1980, the proportion of families with access to safe drinking water has risen from 38 per cent. to 68 per cent. in south-east Asia, from 66 per cent. to 78 per cent. in Latin America, and from 32 per cent. to 43 per cent. in Africa. Enrolment rates in primary and secondary eduction have increased.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Why is the Minister claiming credit for that when our contribution has fallen?

Mr. Goodlad: Our contribution has increased this year and will increase next year.

There has also been encouraging progress in the demographic transition in developing countries. Family sizes have dropped rapidly throughout Asia and parts of Latin America. The average number of children per woman in developing countries has dropped by a third, falling from more than six to below four.

Politically, there has been a widespread move towards democratic and accountable government—for example, in Latin America and in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Between half and three quarters of the world's population now live under pluralistic and democratic regimes. Last year, elections were held in 45 countries—in some, for the first time.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): How can the Minister claim that all those welcome phenomena are due to British Government policy? We await his claim that the Government are responsible for the sun rising and setting every day. There have been positive developments in the third world, but they are no thanks to the Government and their appalling record on aid.

Mr. Goodlad: The hon. Lady is entitled to her view. Change has been most dramatic in east and south-east Asia, where there has been development at a rate unparalleled in history. During the past 25 years, many of those countries have grown, from being poor by any standards to approaching or in some cases passing living standards in OECD countries. They are formidable competitors in their own right.

That experience is now spreading. In south Asia there is a growing commitment to economic reform. Countries are starting to reap the benefits. India—for some years our biggest aid recipient—has seen an eightfold growth in foreign investment. Growth has doubled during the past three years and India's export growth is forecast at more than 13 per cent. this year.

Those in favour of protectionism may quail at the emergence of those new competitors, but it is clear evidence that countries pursuing the right sort of policies can develop successfully and it is a development that we should welcome. Yes, they present competitive challenges, but they also present rapidly increasing markets for our trade and investment.

The most important single factor in determining whether countries develop successfully is their Government's actions and policies. Do those provide a framework in which individuals and communities can help themselves? Do they encourage wealth creation? It is both wrong and patronising to see the developed world as being solely responsible for the fate of the developing world. The successful developing countries are increasingly earning their own way in the world through trade and through rapidly increasing private investment to finance their development.

One encouraging feature has been the substantial increase in the flow of private finance to developing countries. The OECD estimates that total resource flows to the developing world rose by $42 billion in 1992, to $176 billion—a 23 per cent. real-terms increase. Virtually all of

[Mr. Goodlad]

that growth was attributable to the large expansion of private finance flows, which rose by nearly 50 per cent. The World bank expects private finance flows to have exceeded official flows in 1993.

To take two examples, although world-wide foreign direct investment fell in 1991 and 1992, flows of direct investment into the developing world increased. Portfolio equity investment soared by more than 60 per cent. in 1992 as new stock markets opened, many in developing countries.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I am sure that few hon. Members present will not welcome those figures, but will the Minister make it clear that much of that money is going to a few markets only? It is going mainly to the south-east Asian countries—the Pacific tigers—and not to Africa, which is what worries us.

Mr. Goodlad: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Certain developing countries, such as India, have been very aid dependent, but are beginning to attract flows of private investment, by the methods that I am attempting to describe. We want to help other countries, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, to reach a position where they can collect such flows of private investment. That is an important point.

British companies and financial institutions have played a major part in that flow—accounting for around half the European Community total. That clear evidence of their increasing attractiveness for private investment and lending is one reason for a degree of greater optimism about the prospects for developing countries. That is a very important change.

Successes in development must not obscure the massive needs that many of the poorest people in the poorest countries still have. Progress has not been uniform. More than 1 billion people in the world are still in absolute poverty—70 per cent. of them are in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. A key element of our strategy is, therefore, to focus our aid where it is most needed—on the poorest. Those countries do not yet have access to private investment. Many of the poorest countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, have not benefited from the increase in flows of private finance that we have seen.

Our strategy to help developing countries is clear and has a number of strands. First, developing countries need peace and security. That is not something that can be imposed from outside, but the United Kingdom's role in the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Commonwealth makes a major contribution to the international effort to create a more stable and more peaceful world, and our armed forces provide a highly effective and highly valued presence in many peacekeeping forces.

Secondly, many countries need debt relief. For the poorest, most indebted countries, debt repayments continue to pose a massive burden. They swallow up resources which could otherwise be used to finance productive investment and thus raise living standards. If a country is not making repayments, that presents a major obstacle to its receiving renewed external finance other than aid. Again, that is an area in which we have taken the lead. We have relieved developing countries of the burden of £1.1 billion of old aid loans. All our aid to those countries is on grant terms.

We have constantly led the way in promoting international agreement on debt relief for the poorest and most indebted countries through the Toronto terms in 1988, the Trinidad terms in 1991, and now in our push for improved Trinidad terms. The current terms have so far benefited 22 of the poorest, most indebted countries. More than $2.7 billion will be forgiven over the lifetime of those agreements. We believe that more needs to be done and are pressing other creditors to agree to implement full Trinidad terms. We must move forward, with others, to maximise the benefits to indebted countries.

Mr. Cash: On that point and on the very satisfactory arrangements that we have made in regard to Trinidad, does my right hon. Friend agree with my earlier argument about the World bank? Will he do everything that he can to encourage it to adjust its arrangements to suspend debt where necessary, and where appropriate circumstances apply, in countries that are helping to help themselves?

Mr. Goodlad: Yes. On the Trinidad terms, we recognise the seriousness of the debt situation of the poorest, most indebted countries in Africa, which is reflected in the World bank report, and the need for the most generous levels of debt reduction, under the Trinidad terms, on a case-by-case basis. We shall continue to press our partners to take the same view. We regard it as important that multilateral debts are serviced to maintain the integrity of the institutions, but generous balance of payments aid to those countries pursuing economic reform is designed to permit such debt servicing, as well as meeting their import requirements.

I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) about Uganda's heavy debt burden, but action on bilateral debt through the Paris Club will be the most effective way to tackle the problem. Full Trinidad terms—we would like Uganda to be one of the first beneficiaries if these are agreed—would release more money for multilateral debt servicing and other needs.

A critical issue is the ability to pay, and donors have been careful to ensure that Uganda has no balance of payments crisis. Altogether it received £244 million more in 1992 than it paid. This report is very flexible and can be used to service multilateral debt if Uganda so chooses.

Thirdly, developing countries need freer trade. Opening markets is probably the most important single thing that the developed world can do for developing countries as a whole and for the former eastern bloc. None worked harder than the UK in pushing for a succesful outcome to the GATT Uruguay round.

The Uruguay round presents opportunities to all countries and should be seen as a threat by no one. Certainly various studies have suggested that the benefits to developing countries will be unevenly spread. But the increased world prosperity which a successful Uruguay round will bring is good news for all the world and gives all countries the opportunity to benefit—provided they pursue the right mix of economic policies to enable them to do so.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): The Minister has referred to various studies which generally show that African countries will be worse off in absolute terms as a result of the GATT negotiations because the

relative advantage of the Lomé preferences will be lost. Will the Minister give a commitment to make sure that those countries are compensated for the loss they will suffer under the new trading arrangements?

Mr. Goodlad: The recent OECD-World bank study on the round concluded that the proposed liberalisation of trade in manufactured and agricultural products would raise incomes in non-OECD countries by some $78 billion a year. *[Interruption.]* I will answer the hon. Gentleman's point in a moment. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The House does not need a running commentary from hon. Members.

Mr. Goodlad: The report concluded that developing countries would suffer most from a continuation of protectionism or, worse still, an intensification of protectionism.

However, we agree that the effects on some developing countries will need to be looked at in the light of the real concern they have expressed, for example, about the erosion of their advantages in terms of tariff preferences. At the European Community-African Caribbean Pacific council in April we endorsed a commitment to do that, a commitment which was already enshrined in the fourth Lomé convention.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): What proposals will the Government make to assist the countries in the Caribbean which are particularly badly hit, as well as those in Africa?

Mr. Goodlad: That is a matter for the Lomé review. Particular concern has been expressed about the difficulties which net food importing developing countries may face if world food prices rise as a result of cuts in subsidies under the Uruguay round agricultural agreement. But the GATT agreement includes provisions to assist net food importers in such circumstances and, in the longer term, higher prices should stimulate agricultural production in developing countries and so boost rural economies.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am a little worried by the facile assumption that increased world trade will inevitably lead to a better world for the people who live in it. Is not it true that constant and massive expansion of world trade could involve constantly increasingly transportation unless there is particular application to the question of the environmental effects? Is not constantly increasing transportation one of the great threats to the environment? Is not it time we were talking seriously about internalising the environmental costs of transportation and of trade into prices so that we could have a different and more decentralist pattern of production, consumption and distribution?

Mr. Goodlad: I think that the increase in world trade will benefit all countries, but it will be uneven in its impact. I accept that transportation increases will have environmental effects, and I shall say something about environmental matters in a moment.

Ms Abbott: On the specific point of the GATT round, is the Minister aware of the particular problems in the eastern Caribbean, which almost wholly depends on the export of bananas for its balance of trade? When will Ministers face up to the fact that one cannot look at the issues of aid and development in isolation? If the small agriculturists in the countries of the eastern Caribbean are no longer able to sell their bananas, many of them will instead turn to drug production. We cannot look at aid policies in isolation, because they also impact on issues such as the international drugs trade and the refugee question.

Mr. Goodlad: I quite agree that we cannot look at aid issues in isolation, and I am trying to demonstrate that a large number of factors are involved. I hope that we have fought a good fight for Caribbean banana producers.

Mr. Lester: Does not my hon. Friend agree that, as far as the GATT round is concerned, developing countries co-operated fully in the negotiations for the first time? They have been the largest group in the negotiations and they are queuing up to join the World Trade Organisation. That hardly suggests that those countries have all the fears which are being expressed by Opposition Members. The House had a debate on GATT last week.

Mr. Goodlad: My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable on these matters and he makes an extremely accurate point as usual.

We welcome the establishment of the World Trade Organisation which will put the GATT on a permanent institutional footing for the first time ever.

Fourthly, we have a substantial aid programme, one that has been highly commended for its effectiveness. As the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD recently reported:

"The UK has a highly concessional, well organised bilateral programme based on substantial natural expertise and is orientated towards the poorest developing countries."

At over £2.2 billion this year, it is the sixth biggest programme in the world. I understand that new OECD figures are likely to be released tomorrow showing that in 1993 the UK's Aid-GNP ratio of 0.31 per cent. was above the average for all donors, and that the UK was one of seven donors who increased their aid. At a time when many donors are facing pressures on their budgets, that is clear evidence of the Government's commitment to a substantial aid programme.

One key factor in the programme's effectiveness is that it is closely focused on where it will do most good. It is targeted closely on the specific needs of developing countries. Focusing our aid on the individual needs of countries means taking account of the changes in the developing world which I described earlier.

For the more successful [illegible] better-off developing countries, well-targeted aid has played a major part in helping their countries develop. In many of them it continues to do so. But with their increasing access to private investment, many no longer need large scale concessional finance to finance their development.

Aid is equivalent to less than 1 per cent. of the GNP of Asian developing countries, and less than 0.5 per cent. of that of Latin American developing countries. In those countries, our aid strategy therefore is increasingly to provide advice and know-how, and filling skills gaps in areas central to their development.

We have also helped the vital transition to market economies and political pluralism in east and central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Goodlad: I must make some progress.

That has involved help through multilateral channels and through our bilateral programme, the know-how fund, which seeks to harness British expertise to help this vital transition. Our know-how fund was a pioneering idea, and has offered a model of technical assistance which others have tried to copy. Much of the know-how fund is directed at bringing about systemic change, particularly in areas central to the functioning of the market economy such as privatisation, banking and capital markets. In Russia, we are co-operating with the International Finance Corporation in launching and testing a system for land privatisation which has been adopted by the Russian Government as a model for the country.

Longer-term institutional development is not neglected, however. A major part of know-how fund resources is devoted to training, including the setting up and strengthening of local institutions. In Poland, we have helped to set up a network of four regional management centres to train a new generation in private investment. Nor do we neglect the importance of the political transition to democracy. In Russia, for example, our programme for democracy is supporting a variety of parliamentary exchanges and educational programmes involving democratic institutions and principles. The know-how fund's responsiveness and effectiveness in supporting reform are known and recognised throughout the region.

I referred earlier to the continuing needs of the poorest countries. Our strategy is to focus most of our concessional finance assistance on those countries whose needs are greatest and which are unable to attract significant private finance. Some 80 per cent. of our bilateral aid goes to the poorest countries—a larger proportion than is provided by any other G7 donor. Our 10 biggest aid recipients are all low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia: our record stands comparison with that of any major donor. All our aid is on grant terms, thus avoiding adding to the debt burden of developing countries.

In those countries, sustainable development and the reduction of poverty are at the centre of our effort. Our aid is targeted on areas that were recognised at the United Nations conference on environment and development at Rio as being central to promoting sustainable development —such as support for sound economic policies that encourage wealth creation, and helping developing countries to improve the education and health services that they provide.

An important example is the increasing part that we are playing in the effort to help developing countries to address the population pressures that many of them face. The world's population is currently 5.6 billion; it is growing by almost 1 billion each decade, and could double by the year 2050.

Recent decades have seen remarkable progress in the provision of family planning information and services for millions of people in developing countries, but population growth in such countries is at an historic high. More than 90 per cent. of the annual increase in population of over 90 million takes place in the countries that can least afford to provide for their new citizens. In the poorest countries, population growth threatens the prospect of achieving sustainable dvelopment and reducing poverty. Half a million women in developing countries die each year from pregnancy-related causes, including unsafe and often illegal abortions. There are at least 250 million cases of sexually transmitted disease each year, and more than 14 million people are now estimated to be infected with HIV.

Providing safe, effective and affordable reproductive health services, including family planning, will lead to improvements in the health of women and children and reduce the number of maternal and child deaths.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is focusing his remarks on the question of population. I know that, as a founder member of the all-party group on population and development, he has a personal interest in the matter.

Many of us agree with my right hon. Friend that over-population is a root cause of poverty. Does that not make it all the more surprising that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), whose speech was made in all sincerity, made no reference to the population question?

Mr. Goodlad: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right: I was a founder secretary of that all-party group, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). When I entered the Government, I was succeeded by my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), who is now Financial Secretary to the Treasury. We attended the 1979 United Nations conference in Columbo, to which I believe an extremely distinguished contribution was made by Madam Speaker herself.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) did not mention population in his speech; he could not mention everything, and I cannot do so either. It is an important matter, however. I believe that providing the services that I have mentioned will enable women to take more control over their lives.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I am grateful to the Minister: I know that he said that there were many issues with which we might have wished to deal. Today's debate is taking place in Opposition time. I promise that, if the Government give us a full day to debate these matters, I shall be happy to deal with the question of population and other issues.

Mr. Goodlad: I would hardly support my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House if he gave us a whole day to debate population.

The services that we are providing will help to slow population growth and lead to improvements in the quality of life for families. Helping family planning and other reproductive health services is an integral element of our sustainable development strategy. The ODA aims to continue to help more women and men to choose when to have children, to improve their reproductive health. We shall focus on improving access to family planning for both women and men, making pregnancy and childbirth safer for women and improving the sexual health of men and women.

We are playing an active part in preparations for the United Nations international conference on population and development, to be held in Cairo in September this year. Agreement among donors and developing countries on the need for urgent action has never been greater. The conference will provide a good opportunity for us to build on the current level of consensus, which is extremely important. We are working hard to ensure wide support for the Cairo action plan.

As I have said, most of our aid is long-term development assistance; but if disaster strikes—whether man-made or natural—we make a major contribution to the international emergency aid effort. The terrible conflict in Rwanda, of which the hon. Member for Monklands, West gave a moving account, is at the centre of our attention. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced a further allocation of £5.23 million in emergency aid on 2 June. A large proportion will continue to support the relief activities of non-governmental organisations. More than £11 million has now been committed bilaterally since 6 April.

We were one of the first countries to respond with key logistical help to open up communications in northern Tanzania to the refugee camps. We are providing 5,000 tonnes of emergency food aid—a quarter of the amount specified in the world food programme appeal.

We are monitoring the position closely. In May we sent an assessment mission to the region; it found that British emergency aid, including that of the NGOs, is being used effectively and is much appreciated. The co-ordination between the United Nations agencies, the NGOs and the Red Cross movement was impressive. A further ODA assessment mission will be sent next month.

As the hon. Member for Monklands, West knows, the political situation is still volatile and the refugee exodus continues. External emergency aid is required for the foreseeable future. We remain ready to do more, particularly when safe access to other parts of Rwanda is possible. We have offered logistical support to the United Nations aid mission in Rwanda, but not troops.

We continue to be at the forefront of the international community's efforts to help to relieve the suffering of those caught up in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. We have committed nearly £175 million in humanitarian aid so far. More than 100 British trucks, together with drivers and support staff, are working as part of the delivery operation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We are also assisting with vital work to restore the infrastructure—such as electricity supplies in central Bosnia—and helping to restore water and sewerage systems. We are at the forefront of the international reconstruction effort in Sarajevo.

In 1992-93 we provided, bilaterally and multilaterally, more than £290 million in emergency assistance. I pay particular tribute to the NGOs, with which we work both in providing emergency aid and in our long-term development programmes. They show great dedication—as both the hon. Member for Monklands, West and I have seen for ourselves—great industry and, in many cases, great courage. More of our aid is being channelled through them—more than £140 million in 1992-93—in recognition of their special abilities, particularly in working with the poorest. I am sure that the whole House will join me in recognising the dedication of those NGOs and the people who work in them.

Finally, we use aid to help developing countries to address issues such as climate change, the destruction of biodiversity and ozone depletion, helping them play their part in tackling those global challenges. The United Kingdom has contributed £130 million to the global environment facility, which helps developing countries to meet the costs which they face in doing so. That makes us the fifth largest contributor overall.

The speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West, who is the kindest of men, was an excellent example of what his party does best: pious sentiments combined with woolly thinking—not to mention an intellectual sleight of hand which I will come to in a moment. Predictably, he plays games with numbers, and I make no complaint about that. But he should come clean with the House. Is he prepared to pledge that Labour would reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP within the lifetime of a Parliament? Is he aware that the shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), is repudiating all the spending pledges made by his fellow Front-Bench spokesmen in his bid to win the Labour party some economic respectability? Has he cleared his lines with the shadow Chancellor, or does he have his own personal supply of confetti money?

Once again, the Labour party is trying to have it both ways, and it will be rumbled. Fine intentions are simply not enough: the last Labour Government gave a firm pledge in 1974 to meet the UN target and ended up cutting £50 million off the aid budget in 1977 and 1978.

There is only one way to maintain a substantial aid programme, and that is to pursue policies for enterprise and sustainable growth. Until the Labour party understands how prosperity is generated, it will have to go on looking for ever more ingenious ways of dividing up a shrinking cake.

If we are serious about helping the poorest countries, we must let the facts of economic life intrude. Nowhere is that more true than with trade, which brings developing countries three times as much revenue as aid. If we do not take their exports, we shall condemn them to continued poverty. The crucial point is that trade is not a zero-sum game. All countries benefit from increased trade. Yet the Labour party cannot get its collective brain, or its collectivist brain, around this point. The European socialist manifesto, to which Labour is committed and which the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), apparently co-authored, warns that

"the principle of free trade must not be used to undermine social standards in Europe. We must protect our economy from unfair trading and we must try to combat social and environmental dumping".

We could not have it clearer than that. The Labour party sees an inherent conflict between the interests of the developing countries and the interests of Europe. It is worried that the poorest countries might try to exploit their competitive advantage by exporting into our markets. It calls that dumping. We on this side of the House call it something rather different. We see trade with the developing world for what it is—a chance for developing countries to build up their own economies and to become more self-reliant. That is why we have led the drive to open up world markets. The Labour party's hostility to free trade shows that, when the chips are down, it puts the interests of the trade unions—its paymasters—over the interests of the world's poorest countries. While Labour postures, the Conservatives will leave our friends in the developing world in no doubt that only we can be relied upon to champion their interests.

The Government have helped to transform the international debate about aid to the overwhelming advantage of the world's poorest countries. Unlike many who strike attitudes on the subject of aid, our aim has been not to salve our consciences but to take practical steps to help developing countries achieve self-reliance.

[Mr. Goodlad]

We have led the way on debt relief. We have introduced the idea of using aid as a lever for good government, sensible economic policies and human rights. We have led the fight for open and generous trade arrangements for the third world through the GATT. We have argued that aid programmes should be targeted first and foremost on the poorest countries, and we practise what we preach. With our excellent voluntary agencies, whose expertise and experience in the field is second to none—not to mention our outstanding military personnel—we have shown how emergency relief should play a key role in aid strategy. We are saving hundreds of thousands of lives in the process, as we are in Bosnia—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) thinks that that is funny. He has a warped sense of humour.

We have helped to bring about a whole new emphasis on the quality and effectiveness of aid programmes, with the European Commission next in our sights.

The British people are a generous and outward-looking people, with broad horizons born of our history. Under this Government, they have seen Britain recover its standing as a global power with global interests and global responsibilities. Under this Government, there can be no question of shuffling off those responsibilities or retreating into our shell. Nor will we fight shy of asking some hard and searching questions when it is in the interests of the poorest countries that we should do so.

Those are the measures of our commitment to work with others to eliminate the poverty and misery that still affect much of the world. The British public expect nothing less. The world's poorest deserve nothing less.

5.25 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I have never heard the Minister's best friends accuse him of being a dangerous demagogue and I suppose that we must congratulate him on batting nobly for the Government this afternoon. I hope that he will not take it personally if I say that overseas aid debates have suffered in this Parliament from the fact that the Minister responsible for those matters is in another place and not here to participate in the debates; but that cannot be helped.

I do not know whether hon. Members can be accused of tedious repetition if they repeat what they said on previous occasions. I suppose that they should be, and I shall not repeat all our criticisms of the decline in the overseas aid budget, our recognition of what the Government have done on debt, or the fact that they need to do more. I have spoken on those subjects before. In this brief contribution, I wish to support the basic plea for a White Paper on overseas development made in the Opposition motion, but to do so in the context of two issues that are rarely dealt with in these debates: first, the campaign against the arms trade and, secondly, the campaign against corruption.

I remind the House that, last year, a young graduate, Sean Devereux, was killed in Somalia while working for UNICEF. Some time later, his father wrote to me enclosing a last letter that the young man had written to his parish church. In it, he described the chaos in Somalia. I shall quote two paragraphs from it as it serves as an introduction to my remarks this evening. He wrote:

"Everything was turned upside down because of the greed and ego of certain men. Siad Barre, the former dictator, General Aideed, Morgan and Ali Mahadi, the so-called warlords, are the usual names mentioned in this battle of power. But one must add to the list: the US Congress, the former Soviet Politburo, the Italian and British parliaments; apparently a noble collection of men and women, who over the years approved the production and delivery of weapons of destruction to Somalia—for its own self-interest of course. The greed starts here.

Today in Somalia, in the southern part of Kismayo, I cannot walk from my house to my office (a distance of 400 metres) without heavily armed bodyguards. Thousands upon thousands of men in Somalia have their own weapons . . . they tell me this is for 'survival'. Boys of 14 live out their Rambo fantasies, believing they are fighting for freedom. They are so blind . . . but who can blame children. In Kismayo I wander through the market, checking the prices of looted UN food—wheat, rice, beans, etc., and I see next to the bananas and camel meat—AK47s, Kalashnikovs, Barrettas, M16s, Bazookas, varying in prices from $75 up to $200—all made in the so-called 'civilised world'. Next door to my home is a shack with the sign 'SPARE PARTS'. Sadly it's not for cars but for weapons, again made in the 'civilised world'. We have a lot to answer for."

As I have said before in the House, there is no more appalling hypocrisy in international politics today than the way that countries in the developed world compete in the sale of arms to unstable regimes, then stand around wringing their collective hands the moment that they are used.

The United Nations Children's Fund, the organisation for which Sean Devereux worked, estimates in a recent report that throughout the late 1980s, the world's military spending was running close to $1 trillion a year, or the equivalent of the combined annual incomes of the poorest half of the world's people. Those are shattering statistics. The donor nations, including ourselves, need to re-examine collectively our military spending and our dependence on the export of military equipment and technology. I acknowledge that the United Nations register of arms sales is a start, but it needs to be upgraded into an instrument to control the trade.

One of the places where we must begin is the European Union, because it is no good one nation unilaterally taking steps if another undermines the policy. All hon. Members —or most, at any rate—have ended up subscribing to the intentions of the Maastricht treaty to develop a common foreign policy in the European Union. If one considers the arms trade in the European Union, one realises the need for such a policy. For example, Portugal decided on a national ban of arms sales to Indonesia, but the German Government provided naval vessels to Indonesia, so the action of one European Union member state is vitiated by the action of another. The need for a common policy could not be more obvious.

That is also true of land mines, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), the Opposition spokesman. As long ago as last December, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for a ban on the export of anti-personnel mines. If the Government will not listen —as, apparently, they do not—to the Opposition or myself, they might take note of the trenchant article written by that wise old bird, Lord Deedes, in *The Daily Telegraph* as a result of his experiences in Angola, where he saw the effect of land mines. That is another issue on which the European Union could give a lead.

On the wider issue of the effect of arms sales on the developing world, the United Nations Development Programme has just published a substantial and valuable report showing clearly how reductions in weapon expenditure in the developing world could give major help with human resource development. It has argued in that

report that it is doubtful whether the spending by the developing world brought increased security to the average citizen. It says:

"In developing countries, the chances of dying from social neglect (from malnutrition and preventable diseases) are 33 times greater than the chances of dying in a war from external aggression. Yet, on average, there are about 20 soldiers for every physician"

in the developing world.

"If anything, the soldiers are more likely to reduce personal security than to increase it."

We know of plenty of evidence of that. It also says:

"Developing countries have fought few international wars, and many have used their armed forces to repress their"

own

"people. Arms spending undermines human security in another way—by eating up precious resources that could have been used for human development."

It is a great pity that we do not allow visual aids in the Chamber because that report publishes a graph, which I can only attempt to describe to the House. It shows, on the left hand side, a column of the military spending in the developing world, and points out that a 12 per cent. cut in such spending could have the following effect on the health of the people in the third world. It could make available the additional funds to provide primary health care for all, including immunisation of all children, elimination of severe malnutrition, the halving of moderate malnutrition and the provision of safe drinking water for all.

A further 4 per cent. cut in military spending in the developing world could produce the resources to reduce adult illiteracy by half, providing universal primary education and educating women to the same level as men. A further 8 per cent. cut, making a total of a 24 per cent. cut in military spending, would provide the additional cost of a basic family planning package to all willing couples and—this takes up the Minister's point—stabilise the world population by the year 2015. In other words, the gains to be had by giving greater political priority to the control of the arms trade are colossal. I believe that we should pay far more attention to that subject.

Secondly, but more briefly, I shall mention the fight against corruption. Although I am not suggesting that our overseas aid has to a large extent been misused in the developing world, it is a common perception that that might be so. There are undeniably too many examples of the misuse of power for private profit and large-scale corruption in some countries, involving the holders of public office and corporations. That tendency is on the increase.

The victims of that corruption are the poorest people —those who suffer most—because public resources are wasted instead of being used to meet their basic needs. The social fabric of their societies is undermined, accountable government is subverted and market competition itself is distorted. Obviously, grand corruption exists everywhere on the globe. It is shocking enough when we come across it in the north, but countries in the south and the east simply cannot afford it.

That is why I hope that the Government will give full support to a new organisation, which was established last year, called Transparency International. It is a non profit-making organisation registered in Germany. The support for that initiative has come from leaders in developing and industrial countries, from non-governmental institutions, from some multinational corporations and from foreign assistance agencies. It is a timely initiative, because in my opinion the fight against corruption is intimately linked with the promotion of democracy, good governance and accountability, which are the phrases used by our Foreign Office.

I am indebted to the publication "Africa Analysis" for some recent examples of individual corruption by rulers which has deprived countries of the resources that they should have had. Perhaps the most spectacular example today in sub-Saharan Africa is President Mobutu of Zaire. According to "Africa Analysis", it is estimated that his personal fortune is now about $5 billion. There is even some criticism of President Moi of Kenya, an ally of this country, and it is estimated that his personal wealth is now about £3 billion. President Banda of Malawi, who has just been voted out of office, is estimated to have acquired a personal fortune of about £2 billion—a third of the country's gross domestic product. When one looks back over the history of the period since the independence of African countries, one realises that it is, unhappily, the case that, during the cold war, we in the western developed nations were not too fussy about who we were supporting as long as they were perceived to be on the right side of the global ideological argument.

The cold war is over. It is now right to draw attention to those two subjects. What is needed to tackle the arms trade and corruption is not injections of money—the Government are always being urged to provide more money for this, that and the other, including overseas development—but far greater political will on behalf of the Government and allied Governments in the west. I hope that in reply I shall receive some assurance that there will be a greater recognition that those two subjects deserve closer attention.

5.38 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State had batted nobly in the Government's cause. I think that he batted very effectively in setting out what the Government have done throughout their interrelated policy in relation to overseas aid. Perhaps understandably, he moved somewhat lightly over the huge scale of the challenges that remain to be dealt with in that key policy area. I shall spend a few moments discussing what I regard as three of the key challenges in policy terms that still confront the Government.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) mentioned the fact that the balance of our overseas aid expenditure has shifted significantly. At the end of the period of the last Labour Government, the bilateral programme took 75 per cent. of our total overseas aid expenditure; the multilateral contribution, obviously, represented the other 25 per cent. This financial year marks an historic watershed. It would seem that 1994-95 will be the last year in which the bilateral element of our programme will take just over 50 per cent. of total aid expenditure. Figures from the ODA show that the crossover point will be reached next year. In 1995-96, the multilateral programme will take 50.4 per cent. of total expenditure; in 1996-97 that will rise to 52.8 per cent.—and it is likely to rise again significantly thereafter.

Perhaps I was not alone in the House in being unaware of the profound significance of the agreements reached at the Edinburgh Council of Ministers in 1992, and of the impact of those agreements on the control exercised by this

[Sir John Stanley]

House and this country over our aid programme. We face a huge increase in our multilateral contribution via the European Union. ODA figures show that expenditure on the EU element of the programme—I combine our contributions to the EU budget and, quite reasonably, to the European development fund—will take up this year just over half a billion pounds of our total overseas aid expenditure. In just two years' time, in 1996-97, that will have risen to three quarters of a billion pounds, and the figure is set to rise still further.

Figures published only last month in the *Journal of the European Communities* give us the data for the five financial years from 1992-93 to 1996-97. In that period, the British contribution to the EU's aid programme rises at an annual average compound growth rate of 25 per cent. That represents a huge cuckoo in the nest of our total overseas aid programme. As we know, the overall programme is fairly static in cash terms, and hence likely to be declining in real terms. That means that we face a considerable reduction in the overall cash amounts available for the bilateral programme. As the Minister rightly said when opening the debate, the bilateral programme is extremely well conducted; it is performed to very high standards.

I regret the relative ease with which we made concessions at the Edinburgh summit of 1992, the more so now that their full impact is becoming apparent. Nevertheless, the decisions have been made: they are water under the bridge now. They are legally binding, and they are not capable of review until 1999. We therefore have to live with them. Still, for all Members of this House who are interested in overseas aid, the new situation poses a challenge—how will Members be informed about those programmes in future, and what degree of accountability will be obtained for what will represent a major slice of our overseas aid programme?

The Government must examine various ways of ensuring accountability to this House for the large sums of overseas aid that are now going to the EU—sums which, as I have said, are due to rise to three quarters of a billion in two years' time. It will not be enough if the Government merely pay the cheques and offer us a few bland paragraphs in annual departmental reports, and then leave it at that. The House will want information, under four heads, on how this expenditure is being used.

First, we shall want to know how the money has been spent—to which countries it has gone and on what sort of projects it has been spent. Secondly, the House will want to know how much of the money that has gone across the channel to Brussels has been swallowed up in expenses and administration instead of getting out to the communities for which it was destined. Thirdly, we shall want a proper evaluation of the quality of the programmes—how well or how badly they have been run, for instance. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale referred to corruption, and we shall want to know how much of this —British taxpayers'—money has not found its way into the right hands. How much of it has been lost on the way owing to corrupt practices?

Fourthly, the House will want to know how much of the three quarters of a billion pounds going across the channel to Brussels will come back in the form of EU contributions to British non-governmental organisations and will be used in their invaluable work. An altogether fuller analysis will be required if we are to achieve any sort of accountability to the House for the largest single component of our overseas aid programme—that which goes to the European Union.

The second huge challenge that we face is in emergency relief. The Government have made significant progress during their period of office. When the Foreign Office set up its emergencies unit, it took an important step forward in that respect. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, there has been better co-ordination between the Ministry of Defence and the FCO, and that fact has been reflected in our response to a whole series of emergencies—the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85, the Mexican earthquake, the Colombian volcanic eruption and the serious floods in Bangladesh, not to mention last year's flooding in Nepal. There is no doubt that we can make effective, well-targeted and usually timely responses to smaller scale emergencies.

There is, however, a great need to see what more can be done to improve responses to major international disasters. Somalia and Rwanda have exposed the appalling lack of international co-ordination and will that need to be applied to these major emergencies, which are clearly beyond the capabilities of any single country. I am sure that the Government are by no means satisfied with the response made so far by the international community to the emergencies in Somalia and Rwanda.

In this day and age it is not acceptable that hundreds of thousands of people should lose their lives by starvation in Somalia, or that hundreds of thousands should lose their lives because of appalling tribalism in places such as Rwanda—with the international community apparently paralysed and unable to intervene while small numbers of lightly armed insurgents and militias, outright murderers and bandits, perpetrate their violence. Surely they should not be allowed to hold the international community to ransom.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale referred to a common foreign policy. I should also like to speak about that. The European Union's resources include aid and military resources, and its expertise will be increased by the Scandinavians. Surely, under the common foreign policy to which we are committed, we should be able to put together in the EU a basis by which the EU itself could mobilise sufficient resources to deal more effectively with situations such as those which have arisen in Somalia and Rwanda and produce effective action on the ground much more quickly. Within the Council of Ministers and the EU, we should make contingency arrangements for a European Union rapid response to deal with major crises which clearly require international action because they are beyond the capabilities of one country.

Finally, some hon. Members have spoken about the targeting of aid to the poorest people. There was an extraordinarily vast lacuna between the statistics offered by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd)—I fear that my Welsh pronunciation may not be quite right —and those offered by the Minister. The hon. Lady, who has now left her place, mentioned 6 per cent. but my right hon. Friend the Minister spoke about some 80 per cent. I do not know how those percentages can be reconciled and I may wish to probe the matter through parliamentary questions.

My key point is that, although British aid flows to countries that have relatively low per capita incomes, it may not reach the really poor communities within those

countries. Most hon. Members have visited such countries and will be familiar with that phenomenon. A major challenge to the Government is to ensure that British aid continues to reach poor communities. The debate should be in community terms and not in country terms and measured by per capita GNP.

That is a major challenge because much of the aid will be spent multilaterally and we no longer have control over how the money is spent. A significant chunk of the bilateral element of the aid programme goes to eastern Europe and to the former Soviet Union through the know-how funds. The problems in those areas are mostly of a lesser order than they are in the poorest parts of third-world countries. Within the bilateral provision, there is the aid and trade provision whose purpose is avowedly to try to assist the export of British goods and materials. Therefore, there is major financial pressure on the Government to keep their aid programme focused on the poorest.

The policy issue facing the Government is that they need to recognise more fully than they have so far that if they want to get real help such as basic health care and education, water supplies and improved agricultural production into the hands of poor communities, the only way to do it is by and large through non-governmental organisations, and especially through British non-governmental organisations. British NGOs go to the poorest areas not just to visit but to stay for years until they have produced a sustainable uplift in conditions in those areas.

In looking further at how to improve the impact of their aid programme on the poorest communities, I hope that the Government will look particularly at the joint funding scheme. They have increased somewhat the contribution to that scheme, which is the vehicle by which British NGOs can be brought in and by which British public expenditure through money privately subscribed to charities, which British people do with considerable generosity, can be harnessed. That will ensure that the money goes to poor communities in poor countries. I hope that, against the overall backcloth that I have described, the Government will take a radical look at the joint funding programme and significantly increase our contribution.

The three key challenges are: accountability to the House for our huge contribution to the EU, the mobilising within the EU of effective international means of responding to major emergencies such as that in Rwanda and trying to find fresh ways of ensuring that our residual bilateral programme is even better concentrated on the poorest people.

5.54 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Both the Minister and the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) spoke about aid being given to former states of the USSR. What information does the Minister have about assistance given by the European Union to the three countries that are suffering most severely from the policing of sanctions against the former Yugoslavia? I refer to Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.

The Minister will not be surprised to hear that I wish to focus on the relationship between trade and human rights and, more especially, on relations between the United Kingdom and China and the violation of human rights in Tibet. I think that I am accurate in saying that in terms of trade between the United Kingdom and China, the UK has shifted from a crude surplus of some £209 million in 1986 to a deficit this year which may exceed £500 million.

Many Chinese goods exported to the west are produced by Laogai labour, which is slave labour. A report which has come into my hands states:

"Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, tens of thousands of ordinary people in China pick cotton, sew clothing, tan hides, harvest tea, cut shoe leather, assemble chain hoists, mix chemicals, mine coal, manufacture sophisticated machinery or perform one of hundreds of other jobs.

These 'workers' lives are no longer ordinary. The life of a slave labourer is not ordinary in any sense of the word, except to their guards and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party who steadfastly refuse to dismantle the Laogai."

The west must deal firmly with the aging leaders of China, but at present there is a conspicuous lack of toughness among our leaders. As chairman of the all-party group on Tibet, at the end of April I wrote to President Clinton urging him to stand firm on the relationship between trade and the maintenance of human rights. In a letter that I received just yesterday, President Clinton sought to justify his decision to sever the link between trade—that is, most favoured nation status—and human rights criteria. The President stated:

"As you will have noted from my decision of May 27 on Most-Favored-Nation trade status for China, our evaluation of the situation with respect to Tibet was the same as yours, that no significant progress has been made by the Chinese government this past year."

Regretfully, the President's letter goes on to state:

"As you know, I nonetheless decided to end the linkage between MFN and specific human rights criteria. To be sure, I believe that my Executive Order on China played a useful purpose in engaging the Chinese on a range of human rights issues and in producing limited progress in a number of areas, including freedom of emigration and exports of goods produced by prison labor. At the same time, I believe that our future efforts on human rights in China can best take place outside the context of the annual MFN debate."

In his letter, the President acknowledged that there has been little or no movement on China's part to improve human rights in China and Tibet. It also appears that, by his decision, President Clinton is seeking to separate on a permanent basis the relationship between the issues of human rights and trade with China. He said in his letter:

"I have ended the linkage between the two".

In other words, he has removed one of the most powerful sanctions he can employ in his negotiations with the old men in Peking on the important issue of human rights. However, while he and other western leaders would dearly wish the issues of human rights in Tibet and China and the autonomy of the Tibetan people to be put to one side, others continue to press for reform.

Among those significant others I am pleased to say are the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, and I shall quote from paragraph 28 on pages 91 and 92 of their fine report. I am not a member of the Committee, but I was pleased to read such a fine report. Paragraph 28 states:

"We recommend that the UK Government pursues its dialogue with the PRC on the matter of particular human rights abuses in Tibet and opens a discussion on the subject of Tibet's right to self-determination. We conclude that a satisfactory conclusion to the former concern may only be achieved by progress on the latter. Furthermore we conclude that China's attitude to Tibet may contain a warning for the future of Hong Kong. The world will not allow the issue of Tibet to be ignored".

The members of that Select Committee are offering a warning, and indeed some advice, to the people who rule

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

China. We cannot allow the United Nations and the European Union to ignore the tragic plight of the indigenous people of Tibet.

The admirable Select Committee report has stunned the Chinese Government and angered the old men in Peking, who have accused the Committee of gross interference in China's internal affairs for including recommendations relating to Tibet. They offered similar sharp criticism in response to a report produced by a human rights committee in the Australian Federal Parliament which, following a visit to China and Tibet, was as critical of the regime in Peking as our Foreign Affairs Committee was. Those Australian Members of Parliament were denied a return visit to China because of their firmly worded critical report on the violation of human rights in China and Tibet.

Despite the massive trade balance in favour of China, fears of retaliation against United States business exports to China led to the granting of most favoured nation status by President Clinton in direct contradiction with many of his speeches during the election campaign. Once again, we have a example of the President changing course quite dramatically. However, there has to be a maintenance of focus on the relationship between trade and human rights violations.

The Dalai Lama recently voiced his deep despair over the failure—I would say the honourable failure—of his non-violent and realistic approach to the Chinese Government concerning negotiations over the autonomy of his people. Others argue for a violent course of action, but the Dalai Lama has always argued a non-violent approach to the Chinese Government, which is wholly admirable as well as right and proper. The policy of absorbing Tibet into China continues apace through economic means, through the subjugation of the indigenous people of Tibet and through a continuing settlement programme of Chinese workers and their families into the very heart of Tibet.

With other members of the all-party committee on Tibet, I shall be meeting the Minister on Monday afternoon to discuss these matters, but it seems to me that parliamentarians in the west should be demanding that the United Nations, the European Union and the rich countries of the west should use their power in relation to negotiations with the Chinese Government to wrest significant concessions from that Administration in relation to the understandable, natural and justifiable demand of the Tibetan people to enjoy their own way of life in terms of their culture and religion.

The Dalai Lama is not demanding independence but, along with the Government in exile in northern India, he is arguing that the Chinese must pay respect to the needs and interests of the Tibetan people in terms of their culture, their religion and their way of life. We should be saying, "Yes, that is absolutely right: you have a right to such autonomy in your own land."

For many people in the west, they are forgotten people, but some of us throughout the western world seek to bring their plight to the attention of Ministers, who are sympathetic—there is no doubt about that—but who are not doing enough for the ordinary people of China and are failing dismally to protect and defend the interests of the long-forgotten people of Tibet.

6.6 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): In rising to speak in this important debate, I must first pay a warm tribute and commend to the House the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister. It was a thoughtful, caring and detailed speech, full of facts and policy initiatives.

I also listened carefully to the speech by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) who is unfortunately no longer in the Chamber. He used the words, "Fighting poverty" 10 times. He said that we should fight poverty on the beaches, on the hills, in the vales, and so on, but not once did he use the words, "Creating wealth". We cannot fight poverty without creating wealth in poor countries. Unless and until the Opposition recognise that the only way to eradicate poverty in developing countries is to give them the instruments, the methods and the techniques for creating wealth, speeches about running around the world fighting poverty will remain empty rhetoric.

Far from being ashamed of our aid policies, we should be very proud of them. I was born in a developing country and I have seen the effectiveness and efficacy with which British aid was used in Sri Lanka. Today there are 700,000 farmers who create food and provide employment because of what the British aid programme provided for that country. Some time ago, Sri Lanka was a net importer of food, but through the Maha valley scheme, today that country is a net exporter of food.

Labour Members have made a number of points about Rwanda. I remind them that Britain was the first country to go into Rwanda when the problems arose. So far, we have spent more than £11 million in emergency relief to alleviate the enormous suffering in that country and the damage caused by the civil war.

We have heard today about how well our aid programme is targeted. Over the past four years the budget has increased by 10 per cent. The Government's commitment to helping the poorest countries is what our aid programme is all about. We have written off £1 billion of debt under the Trinidad terms. Some poor developing countries—or non-developing countries—were spending 80 to 90 per cent. of their export earnings on servicing their debts. That has been helped by the writing off of £1 billion.

The essence of our aid programme is poverty reduction, health reforms, water supplies and humanitarian aid. Underlying that is a principle that the Labour party probably recognises—Sir John Rawls' "A Theory of Justice", which is to help those who are least advantaged in society to improve themselves. Through aid, we must give them the weapons, tools and opportunities to create a better standard of living for themselves. Otherwise, it is simply an open-ended system under which we provide support, temporary relief, rehabilitation, and so on, but at the end of the day those countries are no better off than when the process started.

Above all else in our aid programme, we can be most proud of the "good governance" criteria that we have employed over the years in the provision of aid. The criteria are sound economic policies, open and accountable government, free and fair elections, efficient public administration and respect for human rights. After all, it is from this place that the rule of law, democracy and constitutional government have spread. Today, especially in the Commonwealth, 1.8 billion people understand and

recognise—even if some do not put them into practice—the values and inherent ideas that have come from this institution.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) made some salient points about the European Community. Our aid programme is being pressured—if that is the right word—so that currently we are putting about 23 per cent. of it into the EC multilateral budget. Unfortunately, we have committed ourselves to increasing that to 33 per cent. by 1999. We must study what is happening in the EC. Rather than acting as a 13th donor country, it should play a more strategic role. It should not become fatter by drawing funds from other donor countries; it should have a strategic, monitoring role in which it could harness the support of the 12 member nations and deal more rapidly with problems as they arise. There will be continuing conflict if the EC acts as the 13th donor entity, growing ever fatter on funds from the 12 member countries. We have succeeded in preventing the EC from drawing more funds into its coffers and in encouraging the EC Commissioner to spend the underspent money more effectively and to set up long-term procedures for disaster relief and rehabilitation aid.

There are more than 18 civil wars taking place in Africa. When they are ended, which I hope will be soon, a massive programme of rehabilitation aid will be required. Currently, the EC is underspending what it has in its coffers. People far better qualified than I have conducted research into that. For instance, the European Court of Auditors found that the Commission did not delegate enough power to staff working on aid provision programmes. Highly paid EC staff were brought in to do mundane jobs in recipient countries.

The United Kingdom has built up, over many years, a vast network through our embassies, high commissions and non-governmental organisations, so we do not have the problem of highly paid staff from London doing mundane jobs in recipient countries. We have a network of people already in place to implement aid programmes effectively. The Court of Auditors' report found that the Community's efforts had so far lacked realism in setting its targets. It also found that 60 per cent. of the projects funded by the EC were over-ambitious or had failed to take local constraints sufficiently into account in their preparation.

The Court of Auditors found that in its projects the EC was prepared to act hastily and without undertaking feasibility studies before creating the restructuring and production programmes to bring people back on stream. As a result, projects had to be considerably modified after only a few months, following further consultation. The Commission seems to engender an ad hoc, learn-as-you-go process. It seems to be on a learning curve. Others who have done the job far better for years should be consulted, or at least left alone to get on with what they are doing while the Commission adopts a different strategy.

I wish to make one recommendation to my right hon. Friend the Minister on our aid and trade provision. Our current practice is to provide finance for development projects proposed by British companies. However, if one of the prioritised projects does not come to fruition, we underspend our ATP budget. Last year it was underspent by 25 per cent. My recommendation is that we have a list of priority projects and if, for whatever reason, project No. 1 fails, project No. 2 can immediately call on the ATP funds allocated for that year, rather than having to go through the whole process again.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

6.17 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I want briefly to follow the points about the aid and trade provision. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee is to produce a detailed report on that in the next few weeks. I am sure that its recommendations will be widely welcomed.

I want to comment specifically on what was said by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), who drew attention to the serious issue of the reduction in the proportion of the total overseas development assistance budget going to bilateral aid and the increase in the proportion going to multilateral aid. My figures show that the bilateral proportion will drop from 58.3 per cent. in 1988-89 to only 47.2 per cent. in 1996-97, while the multilateral proportion will increase from 41.7 per cent. to 52.8 per cent.

In the context of a declining or static overseas aid budget, which has been the case under the Conservative Government over the past 15 years, if the multilateral proportion is increased through organisations such as the European Union or the World bank, but there is no increase in the total budget, this Parliament and Government will have less control over what is spent. That leaves aside the question whether money spent through the EU is the best way to dispense resources. The real answer is to increase the aid budget, and then the proportion going to bilateral would not reduce in the way that it has, or is planned to be, in the next few years.

Figures from UNICEF show that a serious gap has opened between the few countries which are generous aid givers—such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark, which all spend more than 1 per cent. of their gross domestic product on overseas aid—and countries which spend significantly less. Only four countries—the three that I named and the Netherlands—exceed the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP set many years ago. They are followed by France at 0.61 per cent., Finland at 0.55 per cent., Switzerland at 0.46 per cent., Canada at 0.44 per cent., Portugal at 0.41 per cent., Belgium at 0.40 per cent., Germany at 0.38 per cent., Italy at 0.35 per cent., and Australia and Japan at 0.32 per cent. Way down the list, at 15th place, is the United Kingdom.

Under a Labour Government in 1979, the UK spent 0.51 per cent. of GNP on overseas aid, but the Thatcher Government drastically cut that figure, and the Major Government have lowered it further. We have already heard it said that the figure will not change significantly over the next few years. It currently stands at 0.28 per cent. of GNP.

Mr. Deva: Is it not true that the last Labour Government cut the aid budget by £50 million a year for three years, which is the equivalent of £100 million today?

Mr. Gapes: The last Labour Government committed themselves, as did the present Government, to moving towards the UN target, but the present Conservative Government are consistently moving away from that target, year on year. The commitment by Ministers to the UN target is probably not worth the paper that it is written on.

As to the wider aspects of development, much has been said about the need for good government and for policies

[Mr. Gapes]

that assist countries to deal with conflicts. Nations suffering from internal dissension are often those where living standards are lowest and where the problems for tens or hundreds of millions of people are the most serious. It is therefore essential to give the maximum support to the UN and to its various agencies.

They include an organisation from which the Government have, disgracefully, withdrawn British participation and refused to rejoin. I refer to UNESCO. Last year, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee said that the Government should take the UK back into UNESCO. The cost of £12 million is given as the reason for refusing to rejoin UNESCO, but the Pergau dam cost £234 million. I suggest that rejoining UNESCO would be high on most people's list of priorities.

I conclude on one other aspect of peacekeeping—the assistance we give in the form of humanitarian aid in areas of conflict. Clearly, it is not possible for the UK or for European Union member states collectively to act as the world's policeman. Neither is it possible for the UK alone to play a significant role in every internal conflict in every region.

However, it does not help when the American Congress adopts crass and stupid positions. It is not prepared to send in American troops to assist a peace settlement in Bosnia, but it votes to lift an arms embargo so that American weapons could be used to kill British troops operating humanitarian convoys. If the American Congress persists, the time will be near when, for the safety of our own troops, we shall have to take steps to withdraw our forces from Bosnia.

If we do not, outside pressures—together with an unresolved military conflict between the three parties to that civil war—will mean that our troops will be like meat in a sandwich. I say that as someone who is committed to the UN and to international action, supports NATO and is regarded as an Atlanticist. The American Congress—the Senate and the House of Representatives—having effectively encouraged one side not to enter a peace settlement, is now taking decisions that could lead to further loss of life and serious conflict in the future.

It was important for the Opposition to seek a full debate on this issue today. I hope that there will be further opportunities in normal time—whatever that might become—to discuss these serious matters. Given the millions of people who are dying from malnutrition and the tens of millions of refugees worldwide, it is regrettable that this country should become so obsessed with trivia that it does not give proper attention to such issues.

6.26 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye. I confess that I did not expect to be called quite so early, but I am delighted. I note that a number of Opposition Members have gone about their other business. I am sure that they will return, but, in view of the 10-minute rule, if you find that we are short of speakers later, perhaps you will allow us a second go.

It is clear that right hon. and hon. Members who seek to catch the eye of the Chair today have taken a particular interest in overseas development and aid to less developed nations for some time—in some instances, before they entered the House. There is evidently considerable expertise among right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken or who have yet to speak.

Although I appreciate that the Opposition are here to oppose, some of the wording of Labour's motion is unfortunate, if not deliberately disingenuous. It criticises the Government for

"the failure to target aid on those in greatest need . . . the absence of any clear, coordinated strategy for promoting effective and sustainable development".

Earlier, hon. Members spoke of targeting aid to benefit the poorest people in developing countries. One important aspect of the British overseas aid programme is its quality rather than quantity. Targeting and quality are absolutely vital.

So far, except by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, sufficient gratitude has not been expressed for the enormous efforts of those who work for non-governmental organisations and the Overseas Development Administration. They do splendid work, often in very difficult circumstances, and Britain is rightly proud of them.

In his opening remarks, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) drew attention to some of the difficulties of moving towards the target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product. Although the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) may refer to this later, I did not hear a clear statement of where the Opposition intend to find the money to move from the present percentage of GNP to the target of 0.7 per cent.

We all recognise the importance of moving gradually towards that target. Because of the situation in the United Kingdom, I would be the first to accept that it is regrettable, in view of the real increases over the past four years, that there is to be a small reduction in the percentage over the next couple of years. As we look towards the next decade, it is vital that we build towards the target figure of 0.7 per cent.

Although I am sure that the hon. Member for Monklands, West did not mean to be too unfair, as he is generally very even-handed, he did not adequately describe the enormous success of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in negotiating the Trinidad terms. We should not belittle a drop of £1 billion in the indebtedness of some of the poorest nations in the world.

So far, 22 nations have benefited from the renegotiation of the Trinidad terms. I take issue with a point made earlier in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). It is not simply a question of writing off the debt of lesser developed nations: as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said, we must consider the way in which the economies of lesser developed countries are run. In the short time available to me this evening, I want to consider that issue.

First, I want to refer to a point made by the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes). I agree that we should take great care when protecting our aid workers. I have always believed that, if they cannot operate satisfactorily, we should consider withdrawing them from work, wherever they are. Bosnia is just one example.

I am particularly concerned by the suggestion of the hon. Member for Monklands, West that we are not doing enough in troubled areas. The implication was that we should send in more British troops to sort the problem out. Long before I became a Member of this House, I recall attending a dinner at the home of Derek Partridge, the then

long-serving British high commissioner in Freetown in Sierra Leone. He had done sterling work with his colleagues, and was about to leave his post.

The then longest serving Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone was also at the dinner. As a small group of us discussed the incursion of Charles Taylor's men from Liberia into Sierra Leone—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and to Baroness Chalker for ensuring that appropriate assistance is being given to help displaced persons in Sierra Leone—the Foreign Minister tackled the high commissioner and said, "We need your military assistance to tackle the incursion."

As the House knows, because of the war many hundreds of miles from Freetown, there was a coup, and that Government in Sierra Leone fell. One of the poorest countries, and one of the most difficult countries from the point of view of providing aid, is struggling with leaders much younger than I am. When they marched to complain to their leaders in Freetown, they suddenly found that, by default, they were running a country when they had been used to running a platoon of soldiers.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) is detained on other business, and will return to the House shortly to contribute to the debate. In London last year, he and I met a senior journalist on one of the local newspapers in Freetown. The gentleman concerned, who was in his 60s, was advising the young men of 25 and 26 on how they should be running the country.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State drew attention to the importance of British aid not just helping with health care programmes or providing tangible support for irrigation projects, but helping through the know-how fund to deal with some of the difficulties to which I have referred.

I conclude by paying tribute, as I did earlier, to the work of the ODA. Although we should be moving, sooner rather than later, towards the 0.7 per cent. target, there is already a £2.2 billion fund in the ODA budget. I believe that that fund is being used extremely effectively, and I very much hope that we will, in the not too distant future, be able to see a real increase, as we have over the past four years.

6.36 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): The Opposition motion draws attention to

"the absence of any clear, co-ordinated strategy for promoting effective and sustainable development".

I was struck by June's UNICEF briefing which, under the heading "Aid is not enough", states:

"The industrialised nations will also have to create an 'enabling' rather than a 'disabling' economic environment within which the developing world can achieve economic growth. In practice, this will mean agreements on fair and stable commodity prices, agreements on more open access to markets for the manufactured exports from poor countries"

and

"agreements to write down a significant proportion of debt".

I want to address the question whether there is any sign that the industrialised countries, including our own, are creating that enabling environment for the poorest developing countries. I believe that there is little evidence that they are.

Before I was elected to the House, I was a lobbyist for several development and environment non-governmental organisations. Just prior to the 1992 general election, I spent some time lobbying for the interests of the poorest people in the poorest countries in the GATT negotiations. I was often told by, among others, senior officials at the GATT secretariat and senior negotiators from the European Commission that Africa had nothing to do with GATT or the Uruguay round.

I do not think that those people were expressing pejorative judgments on Africa or the African people. That view was simply the reflection of a reality in their eyes, that African countries, which buy little and sell less on world markets, were not to be players in negotiations that were to govern world trade. That was a club essentially for the rich nations, and for the wealthier sections of some of the middle-income countries. The trading rules that were going to be shaped in the Uruguay round were going to be shaped in those interests, not in the interests of the poorest countries.

That highlights a contradiction at the heart of the economic policies that have been pressed on poor countries in recent years through the structural adjustment programmes promoted by the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. At their heart, they assume that the route to development for the poorest countries is through the effective participation of those countries in the global markets governed by the new trading arrangements. However, the conditions for that have not been created and the rules of the game have not been shaped in the interests of the poorest countries.

In the promotion of those structural adjustment policies and with the aim of enabling—that is the theory—the poorest countries to participate effectively in the global market, a number of measures have been taken. The poorest developing countries have been required to make proportionally much larger tariff cuts on their imports than the European Community and, indeed, industrialised nations generally would consider. Those countries have been forced to dismantle protectionist agricultural policies which were far smaller in scale and impact than the protectionist common agricultural policy, or United States agricultural policies.

Indeed, those countries, having dismantled their own agricultural policies at the behest of the bank and the fund, will continue to face subsidised export dumping from the European Community and from the United States of America. Their exports will continue to face escalating tariff barriers, and the greater the value added they attempt to give their goods, the greater their barrier to exporting to our markets.

It was mentioned that GATT has reduced the relative value of the Lomé agreement to many of the poorest developing countries. In response to my intervention, the Minister said that compensation for the Lomé countries would be addressed in the future round of negotiations. That is very significant, because the Uruguay round went on for seven years, and, according to the original agreement, it was supposed not to be completed without a full assessment of its impact on the poorest developing countries. However, to all intents and purposes, that deal is complete, and only now are people beginning to address, without commitment, the impact of that agreement on the countries which will lose.

Although many developing countries have signed up to GATT and will join the multilateral trading organisation, the decision-making lay largely in the quad group of major countries, and, to a lesser extent the only place where

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developing countries had a voice was in groups such as the Cairns group, which was dominated by the middle-income agricultural producers.

The external polices that are being pressed on the poorest countries, coupled with those of debt, have already made it inherently difficult for those countries to participate successfully in global markets. That has been made worse by the internal impact of the structural adjustment policies which the bank and the fund have promoted. Almost by definition, the poorest developing countries lack the developed productive capacity, both physical and human, to produce, sell and trade effectively in global markets.

Structural adjustment policies have simply failed to develop the human resources and ensure the capital investment to enable those countries to play the role set out for them within the global market. All too often, those countries have found that they have been competing over a limited range of basic commodities whose prices have fallen as a result.

Often, despite the emphasis on paper on developing the human capacity of the poorest countries, the immediate impact of structural adjustment policies has been to reduce expenditure on education, health and the skills and abilities of the poorest people. Indeed, although to some extent structural adjustment policies have been linked with political changes—they have promoted privatisation, reduced the role of the state, and reduced state spending—in most countries the main immediate effect of structural adjustment policies has been to widen the gap between the rich, who do exist in poor countries, and the poor in poor countries.

However, from the successful experience of other developing countries such as those in south-east Asia, we know that the fundamental principles that enabled them to expand were, first, that there was a very narrow differential of incomes between the rich and the poor; secondly, that there was equitable access to resources such as land and an equitable distribution of land; and, thirdly, that the state in those economies played an important role in organising economic activity and promoting the development of those countries.

Although there have been lessons about how very poor countries can become successful players in the international economy, those lessons have not been learnt, encouraged or applied, particularly in the countries of Africa. Far too little has been done, beyond the rhetoric, to enable the empowerment of poor people within developing countries. Indeed, the real political effect of structural adjustment policies has been to take the capacity for autonomous decision-making from the poor and the existing governmental structures of developing countries and place it in the hands of what effectively is an international bureaucracy promoted by the bank and the fund.

The Government's policies are going wrong in a sector that has not been mentioned today. It is a matter not just of the level and quality of our aid programme but the fact that our aid programme, however good it is, is swimming against the tide of the type of economic development which is being encouraged among developing countries.

They are being set an impossible task—to move from their current poverty and lack of well-developed, productive technologies and well-developed and diverse economies—they do not have such things—and are being asked to compete successfully in global markets without even the levels of protection and support that, even now, we in this country and the European Union take for granted.

That challenge to those countries is doomed to failure. If we want our development assistance to be effective, we must review the policies that we are promoting in respect of developing countries, not to lock them out of the global market but to enable them to participate in it effectively.

6.45 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): My right hon. Friend the Minister rightly dwelt on population policy. When I listened to his account of the glittering careers of his fellow founder members of the all-party group on population development, I could not help thinking that there might yet be some hope for me as its current chairman.

There have been significant developments in population policy over the past two years. The most obvious, of course, is the change of United States policy with the new Administration. The second was the monumental decision by the G7 summit to address the issue of population and to invite the United Nations international conference on population and development in Cairo, which is due to take place in September, to address the issue and to come up with proposals for the world to consider.

We know the serious statistics on population growth. The world's population has doubled since the war, and it is expected to double again over the next 42 years. But the most frightening aspect of all is that 95 per cent. of that growth is in the world's poorest regions, which, as hon. Members have pointed out, are affected by crime, disease, tribalism and scarcity.

Those countries want to do something about that. They realise that population growth is the root cause of their problems, and that they must have population policies, but they also face severe problems in the implementation of those policies. As a result, there is an unmet demand for contraception by 350 million couples, and there are undoubtedly hundreds of millions, if not billions, of people who are unaware of available contraception facilities.

The United Nations conference in Cairo in September is the best last chance to do something, for two very good reasons. The first is that the climate in the underdeveloped world is now of preparation to accept and face up to the issue. There is awareness that family planning is the best aid investment going. A classic example is Indonesia. It is now considered that 64 developing countries have explicit demographic policies, compared with 31 in 1975 and a mere 15 in 1965.

The second reason why this might be a critical moment is that the climate is as good as it is ever going to be in the developed world to introduce a global family planning programme. I have always felt that the two most influential people in that issue are the President of the United States and the Pope.

As we know, the United States has changed its policy. The 1984 Mexico conference resulted in a reduction of funding for the United Nations population fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The cause was the controversy over abortion and the unwillingness of the United States to fund those organisations. I am pleased to say that the Clinton Administration has overruled that.

Frankly, I would like to have been a fly on the wall during President Clinton's meeting with the Pope the other day when he drew the Pope's attention to the fact that his policy on abortion is that it should be safe, legal and rare. He also said that he did not support abortion as a means of birth control—neither do I—for the simple reason that it is a very inefficient method.

Sadly, the Pope has not changed his mind. If anything, he has become more entrenched recently. I have huge respect for the Pope and the religious movement that he leads; they made a significant contribution to the end of the cold war. However, on abortion, I believe that he is a minority interest. I respect his objection to abortion, but I find his objection to contraception puzzling. What is of greater concern to me is the determination of the Vatican to try to influence the outcome of the Cairo conference. I hope that my hon. Friends in the Government will resist the Vatican's attempts to water down the final declaration.

It is absolutely vital that the Cairo conference is a success and picks up the gauntlet thrown down by the G7 summit. We must now establish a global demographic plan. I have not seen the final draft document which is being circulated, but I understand that it runs to 118 pages and has 16 chapters. It should have only four pages and be set out in simple terms. The Government have made a big input into the preparation of the document. After all, it was my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who got the issue of population on to the G7 agenda, and I know that officials in the Overseas Development Administration have been very active.

I shall make several points about the Cairo conference and the final declaration. First, it is essential that the conference steers away from making abortion a big issue. It is a matter for national Governments to decide, not for international conferences. Secondly, I hope that the final declaration recognises the significance of the fact that reproductive health is included in it. After all, healthy mothers and children lead to smaller families.

Thirdly, I hope that the conference will recognise the significant role that non-governmental organisations can play. I would like to see NGOs around the world follow the example of charities such as Population Concern and Marie Stopes International, which pioneered the concept of social marketing in family planning.

As ever, the key outstanding issue for the Cairo conference is that of resources. I believe that the world is at a crossroads on that issue. We must decide whether population growth is a fundamental issue; if so, we must ensure that it has proper funding. It is estimated that, by 2000, a reproductive health programme will need some $17 billion, of which the family planning component will be $10.2 billion. Two thirds of that can come from developing countries.

If all developed countries contributed 4 per cent. of their overseas aid budget for family planning, population policies and population programmes, that would raise more than $8 billion, and more than make up the shortfall. If that was forthcoming, we would see the world population stabilise at about the 10 billion to 11 billion mark.

The British Government have a fine record in this field. I am proud of their record, and I am prepared to defend it. I know of few other areas of government which have seen such a significant increase in funding as the area of population programmes. I know that the Government are reluctant to set targets, but I urge them to take the figure of 4 per cent. seriously and to recognise the urgency of the situation.

Generations look to the Cairo conference to come up with a solution. If it can establish the kernel of a global demographic family planning programme, if the Governments of the world can commit themselves to substantial increases in funding, and if Britain can say that it has played a part in that, the conference will be a turning point in our history, global turmoil in the next millennium will be averted, and the British Government will be able to say that they played a part in a monumental year. If all that happens, it will have been worth while.

6.54 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): With the problems of the developed and the developing world, one would expect that what is needed is a sense of mission and vision. Sadly, that is lacking in the Government's policies.

We have almost become too familiar with the statistics but it is worth putting at least some of them on the record. We are all aware that the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product is desirable, but no Government in this country of whatever complexion has ever reached that target, although the Labour Government got closest.

Currently, our percentage of GNP is hovering at about 0.3 per cent., but by the year 1995-96 it will be down to 0.26 per cent. of GNP. We are going the wrong way: we are going backwards all the time and giving less and less. The Government will argue that it is not so much a matter of arbitrary statistics plucked out the air as about quality and delivery. If we look at what is happening in the world, however, it is clear that the situation is getting much worse.

Trends suggest that by the end of this decade 770 million people will lack access to safe water and 100 million children will not be enrolled in primary schools. Moreover, the number of people living in absolute poverty is rising by 2 per cent. per annum, so by the year 2000 that figure is likely to have risen from 1.3 billion to 1.5 billion —about a quarter of the world's population.

Access to health services is remarkably low. In Mozambique, for example, 61 per cent. of the population have no access to health services. In Uganda, 39 per cent. have no access to health services. Elsewhere in Africa the picture is similar, and in the Indian sub-continent things are not much better. For those who have not seen the document and who want to study the matter in detail I commend the Actionaid publication, "The Reality of Aid 1994", which calls for comprehensive reading and a lot of study.

The argument about overseas aid—how it is used and how it is delivered—has gone on for a long time. Some years ago, my late friend Judith Hart, when she was Minister for Overseas Development, pointed out that trade had an important part to play in assisting developing countries. All of us realised that we did not want recipient countries to be simply supplicants living off the crumbs from the rich man's table: we wanted to see them develop their own economies and sustain themselves, but the balance is now completely the wrong way round.

The Government rest on trade figures as being wholly wonderful. They forget that 40 per cent. of British aid is tied to goods and services bought from this country. In many cases, developing countries are paying more for the

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goods than they might otherwise pay. What we are seeing is not a new world order, but a sort of new economic imperialism. We must address that topic.

Due to the shortage of time, I shall concentrate on the specific problems of Uganda, which has been struggling on two fronts: first, to recover from the Amin years and, secondly, to cope with the immense spread of the AIDS virus. As though that were not enough, it now faces an immense problem as a consequence of the horrific conflict in Rwanda, with bodies floating down the Kagera river to the north-western shores of Lake Victoria. The health problems that they pose are too horrific to contemplate. I am grateful to the Minister and to Peter Troy of the disaster unit of the emergency aid department of the ODA for giving me a copy of a letter of 15 June from the high commission in Uganda saying that that particular problem is now being contained. However, the Government believe that there is no need for an emergency aid contribution at this stage, apart from urgently needed medical drugs for the worst affected areas, including Mpigi, Rakai, Masaka and Kalangala. Has sanction been given for those medical supplies? What other steps will be taken to deal with the problem, which in my view will persist for a long time to come? Some people in Uganda feel that they have been let down because past promises have not been fulfilled.

We have all heard trumpeted from the Dispatch Box or on television immense new programmes of aid to be provided in different parts of the world, but sometimes it does not arrive. For example, Mr. Manuel Pinto, Member of Parliament for Rakai and director-general of the Uganda AIDS Commission secretariat, says that Actionaid UK and Virgin Atlantic were to collect an airlift of materials for AIDS patients from Europe to take to Uganda, but none of it has arrived and there are no signs of its arriving. I have asked Actionaid to investigate the matter and to give me a report.

The Minister acknowledged in his speech that aid and development policy were inextricably linked with foreign policy, that aid and development strategy were not only about provision or delivery of money or materials, and that of primary importance was the creation of political stability to allow for reconstruction and growth. It is in view of that that I wish to deal quickly with two other issues.

The first is what is happening in Angola, where a great tragedy is unfolding. The pluralistic electoral process brokered by the United Nations broke down when UNITA refused to accept the election results. The problem is that in the discussions and negotiations the western Governments, and Britain in particular, exhorted and pressured the legitimate Government of Angola to make one concession after another to UNITA's Savimbi. We are now at the dangerous stage at which the United Nations might even withdraw its mandate, which has been extended only until 30 June.

We have to grasp such problems. It is no use brokering an agreement and then walking away from it. We have to realise that loss of life is continuing both as a result of the fighting between the two forces and due to lack of food and starvation because humanitarian aid is not getting through. Only yesterday a United Nations aid convoy was attacked and more than half the convoy burnt. Why cannot we grasp the nettle? Why cannot we see that we have to deal with the problem? We ought to look closely at the involvement and engagement of Zaire in the problem. We must face up to these things. It is necessary for the Government to take action. The situation cannot be allowed to continue.

We are in great danger of making the same mistake in Mozambique as was made in Angola. In Mozambique the pluralist election process is being discussed and moved forward. The United Nations has not learnt the lesson of its failings in Angola. It did not make sure that the combatants were properly disarmed. It did not ensure that the influence of the central Government extended throughout the whole country. As a result of that failure, we have seen a terrible breakdown. We must learn the lessons for Mozambique and make sure that policies are carried forward properly.

There is a tremendous new force in Africa. We all expect great things from the new, democratic South Africa. It has tremendous problems to solve on its own doorstep. South Africa has dominated the region in a malign way for decades. It can now do so in a benign way, but problems remain to be resolved. There is an argument about whether South Africa will suck in investment to the detriment of its friends in the front line states, but that is an issue of which the South African Government are well aware. We have to discuss the problems with the people round about.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, we must deal with the problems which are manifest throughout the world. We do not have time to go into them all tonight, but the spectre of poverty and ill health stalks the land. We require political will and firm commitments, but I honestly do not believe that we shall get such commitments—so that promises can be translated into reality—until we have a Labour Government.

7.4 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to today's debate, despite the fact that the issue of overseas aid does not dominate my postbag. I receive articulate and well-argued letters from concerned groups, as we all do, but when I receive letters from ordinary individuals they do not ask why the Government are not spending more: they usually ask why the Government spend as much as they do overseas when there is still so much to be done at home.For most taxpayers, spending on overseas aid is not a key priority. That may well be a matter for regret, but it needs to be recognised. Those of us who want to lift overseas aid up the pecking order of priorities need to make the case, not to convince ourselves but to convince those who have to foot the bill. That is why I believe that the Opposition's motion is ill conceived as well as ill considered. It is ill considered simply because it flies in the face of the facts.

I do not believe that the Opposition heard what my right hon. Friend the Minister said to us this afternoon. He pointed out that at £2.2 billion this year our overseas programme is the sixth biggest in the world. I understood my right hon. Friend to say that new Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures are likely to be released tomorrow showing that in 1993 the United Kingdom's aid:GNP ratio was above the average for all donors and that the United Kingdom was one of only seven donors which increased their aid. That is good news. Praise from the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is neither here nor there, but praise from the OECD and the United Nations is worth acknowledging.

The Opposition's motion is ill conceived because it represents a missed opportunity. Instead of using the debate to make the case for an even greater commitment to overseas aid, the Opposition blithely assume that the case has already been taken on board by the public, which it has not, and then indulge themselves in somewhat sanctimonious, holier-than-thou platitudinising, which rings a bit hollow. It is easy to engage in parliamentary knockabout as to who will achieve the 0.7 per cent. of GNP target first. In the mouths of the Liberal Democrats, it is irrelevant. They once talked about 1 per cent. That is laudable perhaps, but it is neither here nor there: it is all moonshine. In the mouths of Labour Members, it is hypocrisy. When the Labour party was last in office, so parlous was the state of public finances under its stewardship that it had to announce cuts of millions in its overseas aid plans. Whether it is under the shop stewards of yesteryear or—who knows—the ship's steward of tomorrow, it will amount to the same thing: high-minded rhetoric combined with a fatal failure to deliver.

I should like our electors and taxpayers to understand why overseas aid is so important, not only to other countries but to our country. That is one of the reasons why in my constituency about two years ago I brought together a range of individuals from local aid organisations and pressure groups such as Christian Aid, UNICEF, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, Results and others to form the Chester World Development Group. Our aim was not simply to reinforce our prejudices, which is easily done, as we can see from the Opposition Benches, but to find others who may not have given such issues much consideration and to try to convince them.

Last Friday, for instance, we met the leading high street bankers in our community at the Institute of Bankers in Chester and together we examined the issue of third-world debt. The House has been reminded starkly of the dilemma: debt and interest payments due from the third world are three times more than all the aid that they now receive. According to the OECD, the poorest people in the world paid the rich nations £13.4 billion more in debt repayments in 1992 than we gave them in aid.

What are we to do about third-world debt? As the world recognises, even if the Opposition will not, Britain has taken a lead. It has cancelled £1 billion of debt owed by the poorest nations. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out the Trinidad terms back in September 1990, he also asked the UK commercial banks to make "a comparable response". So far, that response has not been forthcoming. Instead, the banks have either sold off the bulk of their third-world debt portfolio to other financial institutions on the secondary market, or they have retained the debt. Neither of those approaches provides any reduction in the debt burden of countries with a desperate lack of resources in which millions of innocent people face an enormous struggle to survive.

The 40 low-income countries have a gross national product of less than $650 per head per annum; yet they owe $4.3 billion to the financial institutions of the richest nations. The humanitarian argument is the overriding argument for reducing the debts of the poorest countries, but there are other important reasons—reasons of self-interest—why commercial banks and other financial institutions should respond to the call for debt relief. If the shackles of debt can be removed from the poorest countries so that they can begin to build their economies, many of the products and services that they will require will have to be obtained from the industrialised countries. That would be good news for us, for our economy, for businesses in our country and for the customers of the commercial banks.

Rightly, the high street banks increasingly promote their role in the community. When there is a disaster in the developing world, the banks are always among the first to step forward to offer help, for example, by providing collecting centres for aid. They are ready to help actively with the short-term crisis, as part of their commitment to the worldwide community. They could promote a more positive image for themselves by acting to reduce the debt burden on the poorest countries in the long term too. In making provision against their profits for non-payment of the capital interest on loans for the poorest countries, the banks have already borne the adverse effects of the debt crisis on their profits. Reducing the outstanding debts would have a minimal impact on their results and on the expectations of their shareholders and depositors.

What intrigued me about the meeting with the bankers in Chester was the fact that, for many of them, it was clearly the first time the issue had been properly discussed; yet it affects their shareholders and customers, just as the Government's approach to third-world debt affects their customers and shareholders—the electorate and the taxpayer. Of course, there is more to be done. One step is to take the public with us on the issue. A top-down policy without a bottom-up understanding and shared ownership of that policy will not work in the long term.

I am pleased that the briefing notes that Christian Aid —whose head of finance, Paul Tyler, made such a key contribution to our meeting with the bankers in Chester —sent to hon. Members for today's debate acknowledged the considerable progress that has been made in recent years. In the south, in the past three decades, the mortality rate of young children has nearly halved, adult literacy has increased by more than one third, the number of people with access to safe drinking water has increased by more than two thirds and the proportion of the world's people living in absolute poverty has fallen from perhaps 50 per cent. to 20 per cent. But that still leaves 1.2 billion people living in absolute poverty.

Aid remains essential for the poorest countries, but overall the economies of the developing world will benefit far more from increased access to trade opportunities than from aid on its own. Christian Aid is one of the organisations which are rightly pressing for much more to be done. It is also one of those organisations which rightly acknowledge that much that is positive can be said about the British aid programme. In no small measure, that is due to the remarkable leadership that the Overseas Development Administration has enjoyed in recent years under my noble Friend Baroness Chalker, ably supported by my right hon. Friends.

Much that is positive can be said about the British aid programme, but the Opposition motion singularly fails to say it. That was clear from the contribution of the hon. Member for Monklands, West, who spoke movingly of his experiences in Africa, but failed to deliver any prescription. He was a fine example of high-minded rhetoric without the will to deliver. The Opposition motion fails to say anything positive. That is because the Opposition remain a party of protest. They just want to make a noise: we want to make a difference—and in this vital area I believe that we shall continue to do so.

7.13 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I congratulate the Labour party on its selection of this subject for the debate. It seems to have based its choice on the publication of the document entitled "The Reality of Aid" produced by Actionaid. I endorse the analysis in that document and the demands that it makes.

I approach the subject from a very important perspective, which is in danger of being neglected entirely and has been neglected during tonight's debate. A month ago, I attended the high-level segment of the second annual meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development at the United Nations. It was also attended by the Secretary of State for the Environment and Baroness Chalker.

Astonishingly, no statement was made following that meeting about its outcome and there was no debate on it. It is astonishing because, in theory, the CSD should be one of the most important global agencies. This year's meeting was especially important. Even though it has a permanent staff of only just over 20, following the Rio summit, it is charged with the task of leading the world towards sustainable development and, in doing so, of saving the planet from the ecological catastrophe that it is generally agreed may be facing us. One cannot get much more important than that.

It is essential to consider overseas aid in the context of what the CSD is supposed to be doing and is trying to achieve, especially as one of the decisions at this year's meeting, which was emphasised by the United Kingdom delegation in particular, was the need to establish close liaison between the CSD and the Bretton Woods institutions—the World bank and the International Monetary Fund—and the new World Trade Organisation, which has a trade and environment committee, and high time, too.

I strongly support the demand for a White Paper on overseas aid, not least because it is time for us to ask what such aid is intended to achieve. Not long ago, it would have been assumed that the answer to a question like that was that the purpose of aid was to enable the countries of the south—to use popular shorthand—to emulate the development model of the north and in that way achieve similar patterns and levels of production and consumption. If Rio established one thing, however, it was that that idea is now entirely untenable because the natural environment is incapable of providing for and absorbing the effects of constantly expanding consumption with an expanding world population, which is what we will have for the foreseeable future, whatever policies are pursued. That is a fundamental fact, which we must understand.

Gro Harlem Brundtland put it well at an international symposium on sustainable consumption in January—part of the Rio process—when she said:

"It took all of human history to grow to the 600 billion dollars world economy of the year 1900. Today, the world economy grows by more than this every two years. Each year, economic expansion corresponds to the entire economy of South America. Only a lifetime away, our 14 trillion dollar world economy may have grown fivefold . . . It is simply impossible for the world as a whole to sustain a Western level of consumption for all. In fact, if 7 billion people were to consume as much energy and resources as we do in the West today we would need 10 worlds, not one, to satisfy all our needs."

That talk of 10 worlds is based on a statistical calculation of what resources, and capacity to absorb the effects of production and consumption, are required. If we take that seriously—we must take it very seriously indeed—it implies an enormously radical change of direction. It implies a turning point in human history and certainly a far-reaching rewriting of economic theory and therefore of ideas about economic development.

There is all the difference in the world between a model of development based on constant economic expansion, which intends to benefit the poor either through the celebrated trickle-down effect, or by some combination of redistributive taxation and income policy, and the model that recognises, as does more and more expert opinion, that there are absolute limits to expansion and that social equity has to be achieved within those limits. All that was recognised at the CSD, which comprises 53 representative nations which this year were represented by their environment Ministers. All the CSD's assumptions are things to which the UK is signed up in declarations and policy statements.

At the CSD, there was a constant repetition of certain fundamental demands. First, we needed new indicators of economic success, as it was recognised that growth rate and GNP are hopelessly inadequate and misleading indicators. Secondly—a revolutionary idea—there is a need to internalise environmental costs so that the real costs of any enterprise in production and consumption are expressed increasingly in prices, and that is particularly relevant to transport. If it were applied to transport, it would transform the pattern of production, distribution and trade, and particularly trade. Thirdly, we must develop economic instruments to encourage development of the sustainable kind. There was a demand for significant changes in taxation patterns, including a far greater emphasis on resource taxation and a reduction in taxation on people and, particularly, on employment.

All this in turn has far-reaching implications for overseas development policies. The countries of the south need to be encouraged and convinced that their new development patterns must be sustainable. That is entirely consistent with the demands of Actionaid, Oxfam, Christian Aid and so on that aid should be focused on poverty reduction, the empowerment of the poor and human development. The organisations are talking about a kind of bottom-up pattern of development, and not the alleviation of poverty through the trickle-down process, which is an entirely discredited theory now.

The southern countries need to be persuaded and convinced of that. However, there is no way in which the countries of the south can be persuaded to for go conventional patterns of growth unless the north and the elites within the southern countries are prepared to modify their current patterns of profligate, unsustainable and conspicuous consumption. That is another fundamental reality. Currently, 25 per cent. of the world's population consume 80 per cent. of the world's resources and produce, for example, 75 per cent. of the world's municipal and industrial wastes.

Those ideas are no longer the domain of a kind of green fringe. They are now part of an emerging consensus on an international level. The ideas are found, for example, in Paleokrassas's chapter in the European White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment. They can be seen in a recent brilliant essay by Herman Daly, who was, until recently, a senior economist at the World bank. They can be found in the report of the Oslo symposium on sustainable consumption, with its emphasis on reducing transportation and on what is called the proximity principle, which is the very opposite of the law of

comparative advantage on which the modern theory of trade is based. The proximity principle says that one should produce as near to the market as possible, thus reducing transportation requirements. That changes everything in relation to the GATT agreement.

The agenda is being elaborated now as part of the Rio process in a plethora of seminars and conferences on various aspects of sustainability and in the inter-sessionals of the CSD. It is a painstaking process, especially because of the need to achieve consensus. We should pay tribute to the heroic efforts of Klaus Töfler, the German Environment Minister, in trying to create that consensus. It is a painstaking process, but it is also a race against time. We have an urgent problem. There is conflict between getting it right and the need for urgent action. Töfler put it rather well, saying it is

"better to get things precisely right at a somewhat later date than to get them precisely wrong now".

That is only half the position, and we must get things going quickly as well. There are—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

7.24 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): May I first give a word of caution to the Opposition, who seem hell-bent on spending the taxpayer's money on a host of projects, both nationally and internationally? I draw their attention to the remarks made by the Minister for Overseas Development when she spoke in another place:

"No one would thank us for putting ourselves once again in hock to the IMF by such spending as is boasted about by some Members of the Labour Opposition."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 June 1992; Vol. 538, c. 431.]

Salutary words of advice indeed.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the phrase in the Government amendment drawing attention to the diversity of agencies which they wish to bring in to help with delivering overseas aid. Among the companies, consultants and non-governmental organisations upon which the British aid programme is heavily dependent is an organisation in my constituency, the Crown Agents.

The House will know that the Crown Agents provide a range of services to the ODA, as they do to other bilateral and multilateral donors. I have seen for myself the excellent work they have been undertaking in Malawi on behalf of the Japanese Government, the European Commission and the World bank. Their considerable logistical expertise and experience have, for the past two years, been providing invaluable assistance in delivering humanitarian aid in Bosnia.

The ODA convoy teams managed by the Crown Agents have, for the past two years, quietly established a level of professional competence and excellence in delivering aid safely and reliably to the most desperate people in the world. It is also worth paying tribute to those who have lost their lives on Crown Agents convoys, as regrettably they have been given barely a word of thanks. We should remember them.

The Crown Agents spread their work across the globe, covering more than 130 countries in the developing world. They have a declared and proven commitment to the highest standards of efficiency and integrity and are independent of any commercial interest.

I stress one example of a country in which I have seen the Crown Agents, and indeed other agencies, operate—Malawi. The lesson which I learnt there particularly was the value of targeting aid accurately and precisely and in Malawi we have certainly seen the benefits of that.

One of the factors that struck me keenly is how effective the international aid community can be when those involved work together. When the atrocious human rights record, which had been continuing for many years in Malawi, reached a point at which it was quite unbearable, the international aid community said that it would withdraw all aid apart from essential humanitarian assistance until it was resolved. The upshot was that elections were held and—to cut a long story short—I was privileged to be an observer at those elections recently.

Malawi is the fifth poorest country in the world. It is a country where life expectancy is only 47, where one child in three dies before the age of five and where only an average of 40 per cent. of the population is literate. In addition, it is one of most densely populated countries in Africa. We have seen what can happen when such countries go wildly out of control, with people fighting for land as in Rwanda.

That lesson of targeting aid really came home to me when we landed at Lilongwe airport, a marvellous edifice which was one of President Banda's prestige projects. It was unacceptable. We drove along a magnificent road into town and yet 20 ft away from the motorway people were hungry, barefoot and living in mud and wattle houses. There was no clean water and disease was constantly in their lives. The essence of survival was always foremost in their minds.

When we give aid, we must ensure that it is used in the right way. Perhaps the most classic example that has hit me was provided by a visit to the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Blantyre. As I entered, I saw workmen feverishly putting together a special intensive care unit that had been designed for President Banda, at enormous cost to the country's health budget. Just down the corridor, the hospital's director was rightly outraged. He said, "What can I do? We are running out of antibiotics and anaesthetics, while money is being spent on that unit."

I am proud to say that the British Government have taken the problem on board and have persuaded the new Malawi Government to divert their efforts away from prestige projects and into rural areas and districts. When I visited a district hospital in a rural area of Chikwawa, I saw the extent to which poverty was affecting medical care. I think it appropriate for the British Government to target assistance on that area.

Education is also important. It is all very well for the education programme to provide university professors, but I think that we should think again about primary education. I welcome the British Government's efforts to encourage the Malawi Government to move away from prestige projects in this regard as well, and to concentrate on primary education in rural areas.

In Malawi, primary education does not mean what it means in this country. Anyone aged between five and 45 can attend primary school there, learning basic literary skills. Without education, it is impossible for any country to develop—or, indeed, to understand how to handle its economy and the importance of family planning. I welcome the Government's efforts to focus particularly on helping women to become more educated and to be more confident about going to school: only when women can take control of their own lives will a successful family planning programme come into effect.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

The problems of Malawi are wide and deep, but it is particularly encouraging that the Malawi people hold Britain in the highest regard. They turn to Britain at every moment of crisis; and by developing good trade, cultural and political links we are not only helping the Malawi people, but setting up friends for life.

7.32 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I welcome the opportunity to speak, not least because of the rather mean-minded comments of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth). What he said flies in the face of the facts, and even contradicts the Minister's observation that the people of Britain feel generous when it comes to aid provision and want it to be increased.

We have heard the figures often enough this evening. We know that current aid spending in this country is 0.28 per cent. of gross national product—the lowest-ever level—and that, because of the freeze, it will fall to 0.26 per cent. by 1995-96. The United Kingdom will then rank 14th in the Development Assistance Committee's list of 21 OECD members. That is not a record of which the Government should be proud; perhaps it explains why they never call debates on overseas aid, which have to take place in Opposition time.

Earlier this year, the committee reported:

"The United Kingdom has not increased its total aid allocations in an amount corresponding to its increased multilateral commitments, particularly through the EU. There was widespread concern among other DAC Members that this pressure resulting from a lack of growth in aid resources, if continued in a programme as important as the British one, could result in a diminution of the distinctive British contribution to the overall donor effort."

That is quite a damning indictment. Despite the comments of the hon. Member for City of Chester, I am sure that his constituents are not the mean, miserly moaners that he suggested them to be, writing to complain about the level of aid spending. That certainly runs counter to the trend—and I do not refer only to other hon. Members. Although there is considerable poverty in my constituency in Glasgow, people there are generous and feel that the Government should also be generous in helping the developing world. I have never been to Chester, and after what the hon. Gentleman said, I have no intention of going.

Nor does the trend suggested by the hon. Gentleman match the mood of opinion polls. Following the run-up to the general election of April 1992, a Labour politician might not be expected to be a particular exponent of opinion polls. I can tell the House, however, that an opinion poll survey commissioned by the World Development Movement just three weeks ago found that almost one person in two in this country thought that Britain should increase its aid as a percentage of national wealth to meet or top the European average within five years. Incidentally, more than half those polled thought that the peace dividend should be used to increase aid.

Sixty per cent. of respondents said that helping poor people in poor countries should be the most important reason for aid. In a MORI poll carried out for the aid charity War on Want last month, which surveyed 1,900 adults throughout the country, two thirds believed that the United Kingdom's aid spending should be equal to or above the average across Europe. If the calculation involves only the 12 member countries of the European Union, that places the figure at 0.45 per cent., 0.17 per cent. above the British level.

May I throw one more statistic at the House? Fully 67 per cent. of Conservatives who were interviewed wanted aid spending to be at or above the European average—only 4 per cent. fewer than members of the Labour party.

Mr. Brandreth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Watson: I am sorry, but I cannot give way because of the time restriction.

That certainly gives the lie to the theory that charity begins at home. I hope that we can now bury that idea: people want more aid to be given.

Mr. Brandreth *rose—*

Mr. Watson: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, as I mentioned him specifically.

Mr. Brandreth: I shall be as brief as I can. My point is that constituents write to me complaining about the amount that we give. The whole point of my meeting the bankers was that they were saying that their customers often felt that they should not be reducing the amount of overseas debt. I was saying that our task was to encourage people to understand the reasons why an even greater commitment to overseas aid is so important. The hon. Gentleman is mischief-making in order to make a debating point on a serious subject.

Mr. Watson: I do not need any lectures on the fact that this is a serious subject. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I have been present throughout the debate. I am treating it seriously and I am not interested in making debating points.

Mr. Brandreth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When an hon. Member has been in the Chamber since the beginning of a debate, is it in order for another hon. Member to suggest that he has not been? I have not left the Chamber once, except for 30 seconds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) has made his statement. No doubt the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) will note what he has said.

Mr. Watson: If the hon. Gentleman has been present throughout the debate, I withdraw what I said. But I have used up enough time on this point; let me simply say that people are more than happy for our aid effort to be increased.

Let me deal with a specific aspect of the aid that we have given in recent years. I refer to the middle east and, in particular, to the question of Palestinian refugees. Recently, I was privileged to visit a number of countries where such refugees are placed. It is the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to deliver aid to the refugees. There are 2.7 million of them in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the west bank and Gaza, and UNRWA performs an essential task in delivering education, health care and general welfare to 59 camps in difficult and often dangerous conditions.

When I visited those camps—in particular, Shatila and Bourj el-Barajni in Beirut—it was pointed out to me, and to other members of the delegation, that the total UNRWA budget of some £400 million was inadequate to deal with

the needs of the Palestinians. The British contribution to that total, incidentally, is £6 million in direct aid, but a contribution is also made through the European Union.

In Lebanon, Palestinians do not enjoy citizenship, have no rights to education, are not allowed to work, are stuck in the camps and have no individual rights. I ask the Government to turn their attention to the Palestinians' needs, especially in the Lebanon.

When we met UNRWA officials, especially Lionel Brisson, head of the field office in the Lebanon, a number of projects were brought to our attention. Some of them were basic and simply involved rehousing Palestinians, many of whom were made refugees in 1948 and displaced persons following the conflict after the Israeli attacks in 1982 and again in 1986-87. Simple matters such as the construction of internal sewerage systems and clinical laboratories in the camps and the provision of general housing are pressing for those concerned. They specifically asked that I raise this matter, which I am pleased to do. I hope that the Minister will reply because those refugees are in a desperate position and the recent peace negotiations —the Gaza-Jericho accord—mean nothing to them. They have been abandoned, but feel that UNRWA could look after them, if only it had adequate resources to do so.

I also met UNRWA officials when I visited Gaza. Although I have found no hon. Member opposed to the Gaza-Jericho agreement, it can progress no further because of the lack of resources in the municipality in Gaza. I met the Palestinian police and the army general in charge of overall security in Gaza. Of the $5 billion committed there over the next five years to underwrite the accord of September 1993, only $30 million has been delivered. The local administration needed in Gaza cannot be set up and services cannot be provided to the people in what is the most densely populated part of the world. Thus the people are caught in a catch-22 situation: the donor countries will not release the money because there are no accounting or taxation systems, so the money that is spent cannot be accounted for; yet the Palestinians do not have the money to install those systems and ensure that what they do is transparent.

The donor countries seem to be interested only in capital projects, which means that the people of Gaza are stuck and the whole peace process could grind to a halt. That could never have been the intention of the donor countries and those who brokered the historic agreement of last year. UNRWA will act as a conduit for funds if that is how the donor countries are happy to proceed. It is important that the logjam be broken. Civil servants, local government administrators and legal administrators are needed to set up those processes to allow the Palestinians to help themselves. Nobody ever believed that the peace process would grind to a halt because Gaza did not have the resources to do what the agreement allows it to do.

If the British Government will not assist, will they get together with the other donor Governments and ensure that the funds to enable the Palestinians to build their own authority in Gaza and, one hopes, take the peace process a step further are put into place without further delay? Not to allow that accession, as part of the peace process, to continue will simply play into the hands of the extremists, which could bring the whole process to a grinding halt. That would be tragic not just for the Palestinians but for those countries that have so patiently and meticulously brought the peace negotiations to their present position.

7.42 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am grateful for an opportunity to speak in this important debate. I apologise for not being here for the opening speeches, but the rail strike meant that I had to go more slowly by car to Exeter to speak to Exeter university agriculture students. Although I enjoyed that, I was sorry to miss the opening speeches in a debate of such profound value and importance.

In this Chamber and beyond, it is widely recognised that the policies of Her Majesty's Government on overseas aid and development are influential. Not only do they assist the poorest of the poor, finding jobs for people in many countries overseas and creating sustainable development, but they are honest, give value for money and respect the people whom they attempt to serve.

I speak from personal experience. Hon. Members often do not have the benefit of personal experience but speak from other people's experience. I was keen to contribute to the debate because I have had the benefit of learning about the Government's aid and trade policies from the grass roots—the developing countries' perspective—for some time. I was the director of fund raising for the Save the Children Fund, Britain's oldest and largest children's charity for developing nations.

I now have the honour to be on the United Kingdom board of UNICEF, so I have a little experience—not much, as I have not been there long—of United Nations agencies' work through UNICEF. I also work hard as a partner of UNESCO in my work as chairman of the AMAR appeal, a charitable organisation registered in the United Kingdom, which works in the Persian Gulf. We now also work in eastern Europe—Bosnia, Romania and Poland—and we hope also to work in central Asia. Thus, I have had personal experience of the aid policies that we are debating tonight. I also declare a personal family interest: my husband, Sir Michael Caine, is deputy chairman of the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

The Opposition motion says that the poorest are not aided by the British Government. In fact, while our policies and agencies cannot hope to touch all of the many millions of the poorest of the poor, I can honestly say that they reach out and meet the needs of a large number of them. In the aftermath of the Gulf war, when the degradation of the marsh Arabs in Mesopotamia and the plight of the Iraqi Shi-ites hit no headlines anywhere, while the Kurdish tragedy was spilling over on our screens, to whom should I turn first but to the Minister for Overseas Development? She found time to give me invaluable assistance. Her Department works hard and carefully.

From that day to this, assisted by the Overseas Development Agency—I pay tribute to Ron White who currently runs the Iraq desk—and the European Community Humanitarian Office of the European Union, we have been able to feed some 2.5 million needy people. By "needy" I mean starving people who have no water, who may have cholera, anaemia or bilharzia. Some of them are dying and we cannot save their lives but it has been heartening to discover the great understanding in the Overseas Development Agency for that important work. We now have a team of 60 medical staff and 160 teachers on the ground in southern Iran. I hasten to add that by no means is that work fully funded by the ODA. How wonderfully easy my life as chairman would be if it were. We make extensive public appeals.

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

The late Neil Marten was the Minister responsible for overseas development when the non-governmental organisation pound-for-pound policy was created. Some hon. Members here tonight, and many hon. Members not in the Chamber, will recall how he set about that task. He invented that policy and countless millions of the poorest of the poor have benefited from it. He made it possible for British non-governmental organisations, large and small, to start excellent projects—for which it is not always possible to gain the necessary support from the general public—and have pound-for-pound matching grant aid. A pound given in a church collection is matched by a pound given by the Government; a pound raised by shaking tins on street corners or at Victoria station is matched by a pound taken out of the pocket of UK taxpayers.

I know the difficulty of justifying such far-sighted aid and development policies when people in inner cities or rural areas such as my constituency have a difficult time financially, particularly during a recession. For example, the margins of farming in Dartmoor are so slender that they are sometimes invisible. Yet overall, the benign policies and views of the Government and the United Kingdom public continue to make our overseas aid programme one of the largest and most important in the world today.

The Commonwealth Development Corporation was set up in 1947. My father-in-law, Sir Sidney Caine, was instrumental in the Treasury in bringing that into being. I am proud of the fact that Her Majesty's Government foster the concept of creating sustainable development, and that we have done so since the immediate post-war period by mens of the CDC.

I have witnessed many possibilities for sustainable development in which the Commonwealth Development Corporation, through loans, has invested British taxpayers' money. Indeed, I think that it has only to wash its face; it does not aim to make a profit and it must not make a loss. Any small surplus is ploughed back in again. By careful handling of the funds and the policies, it has created many hundreds of thousands of jobs in the developing world. The organisation now works in about 47 different countries.

When I was in Brussels recently, the senior ECHO official, Mr. Donato Chiarini, and his superior, the director, Mr. Gomez Reino, spoke most warmly about the non-governmental organisation world in the United Kingdom, commenting favourably on that system of charitable support for the poorest of the poor and for sustainable development, which flows out of the United Kingdom. That non-governmental organisation effort would be much less than half the relative success that it is if Her Majesty's Government did not perceive the importance of assisting throughout the world in so many difficult regions, in regions of conflict, in regions of poverty, and in regions of unbelievable human misery, such as the Mesopotamian marshlands.

I commend Her Majesty's Government for the fine work that they do in overseas aid and in sustainable development and I urge them to do more.

7.51 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I wish to put on record my apologies to the House for missing half the debate. I was at the meeting of the Select Committee on Social Security and therefore obviously could not be in two places at once, although one does try.

The debate must be put in the context of the horrors that confront the majority of the population of the world and the devastation that confronts a significant minority of the world's population. At any time, 20 per cent. of the world's population are desperately hungry; half are on the brink of complete starvation. Twenty-five per cent. of the world's population lack safe water, 33 per cent. live in conditions that none of us would recognise as anything other than dreadful poverty, and every year there are 8 million wholly preventable child deaths throughout the world. The slum conditions that used to appertain in Victorian England—and Scotland and Wales, for that matter—are being visited on the children of a fast-developing world where there is an increasing level of disproportionate poverty.

Members of the House are pretty good at travelling. I hope that when they travel they manage to get outside the Sheraton hotel of whichever capital city they happen to have landed in, and go to look at the shanty towns that are growing around the capital cities of every third world country as a process of industrialisation and depopulation of rural areas takes place. I hope that they will look at the misery that those communities live in and have to suffer.

In that context, one has to ask, what policies can be followed by any national Government, and what policies can be followed by multinational agencies, to try to redress those horrors? If we did not care about them, we would not even be debating them.

Although in a short speech one can give only a few pointers, I think that the emphasis that was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) to the problems of debt and debt write-off is important. Obviously, it is important to write off debts, which, frankly, have not been incurred in a spendthrift, dangerous or profligate way by those poor countries. They have been imposed on them by the rigidity of a commodity pricing system and a penurious banking system which drags money from the poorest to pay to the richest. A rapidly increasing transfer of wealth from the very poorest to the richest is taking place in the world. Wealth is not flowing in the direction in which it is needed.

Although I welcome any debt write-off—obviously, everyone would welcome any debt write-off—it is not good enough to write off a debt if at the same time one does not try to create the economic conditions that can prevent a recurrence of that debt. If, as I said in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West, the commodity prices that are paid to poor farmers in those communities are not increased, the debt problem simply becomes worse. The poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, even after Trinidad terms, are being forced to spend a huge proportion of their export earnings simply on paying debt to the banking systems of the north. It is wrong and it is immoral, and many people fully understand that.

We have an aid budget in this country, insufficient and inadequate though it may be. The Government also promote a political philosophy, which is one of essentially trying to impose their curious view of the world and economic and political systems on the rest of the world.

They are increasingly trying to tie aid to political systems in the recipient countries. Increasingly, they are trying to tie aid to what they call economic restructuring and the development of a free market economy, in the clever mixture of words that Mrs. Thatcher was so good at using by saying that a free market economy equals a free society and a free democracy. It certainly does not. There are plenty of examples throughout the world of countries where there has been a totally free market economy and a fascist political system to ensure that it maintains itself as a free market economy. Throughout the Pinochet years in Chile there was very much a free market economy with a secret police to ensure that it stayed that way—and there was no excessive expenditure on the social needs of the people.

There are pressures in the other direction because we, as millions of people do throughout the world, understand the unsustainability of the world's economic system. We cannot go on exploiting raw materials at the rate that we do, we cannot go on polluting the waters, we cannot go on overfishing the seas, and we cannot go on destroying natural forests, be they tropical rain forests, temperate forests, Arctic forests or sub-Arctic forests, without paying a penalty. The penalty is in climatic change; the penalty is in environmental disaster.

It is not something that will happen; it is happening here and now. The Rio summit, the Rio conference, was an important step forward in that, for once, all the countries of the world at least met to discuss the common agenda of the environmental problems of the world.

There were some serious flaws in the declaration at the end of the Rio summit. President Bush ensured that there were some serious flaws in it, because he was not prepared to agree to the transfer of technology and intellectual property to poor countries. Essentially, it was an attempt to maintain that power in the wealthier countries of the north.

We have now had the GATT deal, which we debated last week. The GATT deal has been presented as a victory for everyone—"Everyone is a winner in GATT". It is rather like *The Sun* bingo competition, which no one ever apparently loses. I do not welcome the GATT deal. It has some appalling side effects. For example, it is estimated that sub-Saharan African countries will lose $3 billion as a result of the GATT trade deal. It was far from welcomed universally by the Ministers of the southern and poorer countries who were there. For example, Shamsul Islam, the Commerce Minister of Bangladesh, said:

"the concerns of the least developed countries have not been adequately reflected in the Final Act".

He went on to ask for a comprehensive assessment of the results of the GATT round, and pointed out that the share of world trade by the least developed countries declined from 0.6 per cent. in 1980 to 0.3 per cent. in 1992. In that period, the ratio of their exports to gross domestic product decreased from 14.4 per cent. to 7 per cent. That is hardly a success story throughout the 1980s, and I suspect that the GATT treaty and the GATT deal that has come with it will not improve things for those countries; it will increase the disparity between the richest and the poorest nations. Those issues must seriously be tackled.

We must then ask where the overseas aid budget of the British Government fits into that, as that is the one over which, one hopes, we have some control in the House. The experience of some of the expenditure on aid is appalling. There is a lack of examination of the side effects of major projects. The Mahawili dam in Sri Lanka was a marvellous project; it is a shame that the people who lived around it could not afford to buy the electricity that was produced from it. The Pergau dam was a scandalous waste of money. It was designed to benefit corrupt politicians in the country concerned and to benefit certain companies in this country. There is nothing wrong with exporting goods from here, but let us be honest about what aid projects are for.

We always have to ensure that any aid we send helps to promote sustainable development and to keep communities together, not to split them up. We must develop sustainable agriculture systems of the type that existed centuries before the European colonialists arrived in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We have no right to flood those countries for major dam projects, or to impose on them the excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Sustainable development is the only way forward.

Instead, the record of our aid budget has been appalling, and the fact that it is declining is also a disgrace. My hon. Friends have pointed out that many people support an increase in the aid budget because they understand that, in humanitarian terms, it is simply wrong that 8 million children a year should die of wholly preventable diseases and that a quarter of the world's population should go hungry every day. We have to do something about that, otherwise we shall reap the whirlwind in decades to come.

8 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I always seem to follow the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) in these debates—

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman should agree with me then.

Mr. Lester: I do agree with some of what the hon. Gentleman says, but not with an awful lot of it.

We debated GATT only a week ago, for instance. Bangladesh is one of the many poorer countries that will experience export growth—over 14 per cent. in its case—as a result of GATT. It was strange, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman should pick on it as one of the countries that will not benefit. The developing world fully co-operated in the GATT round and was one of the driving forces behind it. All the estimates that I have seen suggest that the developing world stands to benefit by more than a third in terms of world growth. Certainly we know that there are problems in certain sub-Saharan and African countries, but steps have been taken to deal with them, and it would be wrong to discourage the rest of the world just because there are likely to be problems with some of the weaker links—provided we can deal with those weaker links.

I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). It was typically full of humanitarian concern, and he described visits that he has made and situations that he has witnessed. I assure him that not all of us stay in Sheraton hotels. I dare say I have stayed in more grubby places than has the hon. Member for Islington, North.

We are all capable of reciting a litany of the world's problems, but I thought that the hon. Member for Monklands, West was short on solutions and particularly short on committing the Labour party to spending more money. He carefully avoided any such commitments,

[Mr. Lester]

presumably because the shadow Chancellor takes the same view of these matters as the Chancellor does. The problem will certainly not be solved by a White Paper.

As for the Government motion, it is certainly accurate to say that we now provide more information about overseas aid and development than ever before. That is a direct result of the concerted campaign by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee for such information. Our report on China has already been mentioned. I am sure that most hon. Members who read our foreign affairs reports recognise their fairness and their independence.

That brings me to the sloppy way in which the Opposition motion has been drafted, particularly as it relates to the Pergau dam affair. The Opposition seem to mutter it like an incantation—"Pergau dam, £300 million. Pergau dam, £300 million." The Select Committee is examining the matter objectively and we shall produce a report that will be both fair and accurate. The Opposition, too, should try to be fair and accurate; they should recognise that the dam is not a white elephant. Nor is it true to say that it is not wanted by the country concerned. It will last for 100 years, generating electricity, and it was well engineered. The extent of the commitment is £70 million over 14 years. That represents 1.3 per cent. of the aid and trade provisions budget, which in turn is only 9 per cent. of the total budget for overseas development. Any attempt, therefore, to link it with the genuine bilateral aid programme amounts to disinformation.

It behoves the Labour party to recall that it invented the ATP programme during its period of office, a long while ago, yet now the Opposition criticise it. Are they prepared to see British industry go naked into the market places of the world? The contenders for the Labour leadership campaign on the issue of employment. Perhaps they should first check how much employment is provided by the companies involved in the Pergau dam affair. If they want to talk about employment in the United Kingdom, as well as improvements in the rest of the world, they should first clarify their position on the aid and trade provisions. They should certainly not confuse the latter with our major bilateral aid programme.

I can certainly confirm what the Minister said about the British Government's commitment on debt. Along with two Labour and two Conservative Members, I happen to be a member of the African caucus, which has been doing a great deal of work on Ugandan debt and the debts held by sub-Saharan Africa. The most enthusiastically supportive people whom we have met have been the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, both of whom are prepared to see the International Monetary Fund sell gold to achieve some movement in this area.

The point I want to get across to the Opposition is that we cannot do this on our own. We are part of a multilateral organisation. To be sure, the enhanced Trinidad terms, which we invented and pushed for, apply; but unless we can persuade the Japanese to come on board, we can make no more progress. We would welcome help from the Opposition in these matters, instead of which they slate us while we continue to be positive and get on with the job. They should bring their influence to bear on the people who are impeding progress—in this case, the Japanese.

The all-party group on overseas development set up a working party on multilateral debt. It has finished its research and is now drafting its report. In this area, too, it is not the British who are holding up progress. We are trying to persuade the Americans, the major contributors, to change their policies. Most of us recognise that the writing off of bad debt must be framed and understood in a new way—without writing off bad debt. Perhaps we could put it in cold storage and call it something else; in any case, the way forward must involve the ending of repayments. It is no longer sensible of the Opposition to hammer away at us, claiming that it is all our fault. We are taking the lead in forcing through change, and we are not the ones preventing progress.

I am entirely satisfied with the direction of our aid programme and the analysis given to it. I do not share the concern expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) about the proportion of the budget that goes to European Union multilateral organisations. If that aid is properly channelled and organised in the same way as we handle bilateral aid, it can have a cumulatively good effect. Of course, we all want the money to be wisely spent and carefully scrutinised, but there is nothing wrong with nations increasingly co-operating in this area.

We receive many European documents—if people are only prepared to read them—that analyse the European aid programme. The European Community humanitarian office has just released to us a document of this type. It has already accredited eight of our NGOs—eight out of a total of 80. That is fine. They are all worthy organisations: the British Red Cross Society, Care Britain, Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Feed the Children, Helpage International, Oxfam, and Save the Children Fund. These NGOs will be the recipients of money that comes partly from Britain and partly from the other 11 member states, and together they will be able to carry out worthwhile humanitarian aims.

It is all very well to complain about an increasing proportion of the budget going elsewhere, but a lid has been put on the total budget. I, like the Opposition, want an increased aid programme; meanwhile, it is no good moaning about the proportion going elsewhere as long as overall limits are put on the total amount. In those conditions, the proportion going elsewhere will obviously increase. We look forward to an early increase in our aid budget.

I want to comment principally this evening on the role of the United Nations, especially as it affects Rwanda. Of course we must also consider the United Nations in the context of Angola and Cambodia where the UN carried out operations. In Angola it conducted an election for a Government, but because the international community did not commit sufficient funds to the organisation and enough military power to disarm the combatants, the election was null and void and since then the situation has become worse. There have been more tragic and dreadful deaths in a country that has tremendous potential. With a proper Government it could develop that potential and its resources through links to South Africa. It is a tragedy that after the UN exercise the problem is worse.

I have given many years of my life to Cambodia, and the situation there is precisely the same. There was tremendous UN participation in taking over a country in which genocide in my generation really came to the fore. The UN ran an election that everyone praised and 85 per cent. of the population turned out to elect the Government that they wanted. However, because we now seem to feel that

internationally we have done our bit, we have turned our backs on a country which continues to be undermined by the Khmer Rouge. The international community does not seem prepared to give that genuinely elected coalition Government the resources to carry out their function in defending the country's borders and dealing with people who do everything that they can to undermine the work to which we have all subscribed through the United Nations.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend think that the international co-operative efforts that he has described would be better handled by the United Nations, or does he agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), who seemed to place greater emphasis on the European Union?

Mr. Lester: I am interested in that matter and I shall answer my hon. Friend's question as I develop my speech.

The real concern about Rwanda is that there is no international will to deal with what I would describe as a machete-wielding militia. Let me read from the report about Rwanda that the Secretary-General sent to the Security Council:

"The delay in reaction by the international community to the genocide in Rwanda has demonstrated graphically its extreme inadequacy to respond urgently with prompt and decisive action to humanitarian crises entwined with armed conflict."

I shall not read the whole of the report. I responded to the hon. Member for Monklands, West when he said that the UNAMIR minimum presence was reduced. The report states:

"since its original mandate did not allow it to take action when the carnage started, the international community appears paralysed in reacting almost two months later even to the revised mandate established by the Security Council . . . Our readiness and capacity for action has been demonstrated to be inadequate at best, and deplorable at worst, owing to the absence of the collective political will."

That brings me to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks). I constantly hear it said, "Is the life of a British soldier worth involvement in Rwanda?" Could we see British forces in Rwanda—or American forces in Bosnia, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Islington, North? There is concern about seeing our national forces involved in a peace-making operation. The consensus seems to be that we need a peace agreement and then we will monitor it. But from much experience of looking at these events around the world, I submit that we need something between chapters 6 and 7 of the United Nations mandate. Those chapters are quite clear, but many situations in the world fall between the two and call for chapter 6.5 or 6.75.

We must address the problem of how to give the United Nations the means to carry out our collective will because if that collective will does not operate there can be no international law or an international community. There are two options and the Select Committee spent much time looking at the future of the United Nations and how it could be developed. We said that first and foremost there should be a genuine military assessment system at the disposal of the Secretary-General consisting of people who could make active plans of what was needed and where it should come from.

Secondly, we suggested that every country with well-trained forces—and such countries exist not just in western Europe but throughout the world—should be able to second special units and have them ready and available if the United Nations wanted them quickly. Those of us who followed events in Somalia knew that Ambassador Shanoun, who was trying to solve the problems there, said that if he had got the Pakistani forces within weeks instead of months the situation in Somalia would never have deteriorated to the extent that it did.

It is a question of how to provide the military means for the United Nations to operate. A friend of mine, Congressman Jim Leach, looked at the United Nations in exactly the same way as the Select Committee. Congress came to the conclusion that the United Nations itself should have at its disposal trained soldiers who had committed themselves to international intervention. That is one of the ways forward and it was suggested in the original charter. The Government, the Opposition and all those who are genuinely concerned to see international order have to grasp the nettle and argue the case. Do we have specialist units trained and available, or should the United Nations itself have trained forces?

Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Zimbabwe have all offered their troops to help to solve the problem in Rwanda; but none of those countries has the means to get them there or to equip them to do the job. The French have said, "We are sick of this terrible tragedy of people being slaughtered by machete-wielding militia, and 2,000 good French troops could solve the problem." I suppose that they could, but then we encountered the problem of the Rwandan Patriotic Front saying, "We do not trust the French." Back we go, and in the meantime more children are slaughtered, more die and more innocent people are harmed.

As part of the overall concept of international order we need to grasp the problem of how to give the United Nations the means for its collective will to be enforced efficiently and properly. That is the principle.

Dr. Kim Howells: I am loth to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's speech because it is so thoughtful and visionary, but what is his view of the lack of a feasible power bloc in Africa? Is one of the vacuums in Rwanda and Somalia due to the fact that there is not the presence that there is in Europe of, for example, NATO?

Mr. Lester: Of course, and the problem with Africa is simply that it does not have workable regional organisations in any context, whether in trade, aid or working together. Part of its poverty is simply due to the fact that, collectively, it hardly trades within itself. I think that throughout Africa 4 per cent. of countries trade one with another. The same applies to the military.

Of all continents, Africa has been the victim of the cold war, with different regimes profiting first from the Americans and then the Russians and then from anybody else who would give them money. They had got used to that, and now they have to start all over again and we need to help them. That is the most important point.

In today's world there are changing needs. In the past 20 years during which I have been in the House the way in which we look at aid and the way in which countries receive it have changed dramatically. There are now institutions such as the Foundation for Democracy and the know-how funds, which have worked particularly well. I should like to make a plug for the local government content, which I was pleased to note my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned. In my experience, throughout the world many people who need the sort of services and support that the hon. Member for Islington, North

[Mr. Lester]

mentioned get them, not from national Governments, but from local organisations and local government. That dimension has just started to come forward.

The local government international bureau has just published a very good document on global partnership. I commend it to all hon. Members and urge them to get a copy to check whether their local authorities are involved in an international partnership. Thanks to a private Member's Bill for which I was responsible, such partnerships can now be thickened from knowing, talking and exchanging from schools to the actual transfer of technology and knowledge which is of real benefit to the people that they serve. It is done at minimal cost, as cost is not great in terms of know-how, technology and information. I hope that we shall all encourage our own local authorities to show an interest in the international concept of what they can achieve.

I am also delighted to tell the House that, thanks to the generosity of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, who provided some pump-priming money, we now have a Commonwealth local government forum which we designed as a momentum within the Commonwealth to promote throughout the Commonwealth, all speaking the same language, the concept of local government change. It will be based here in London, as is the Commonwealth Secretariat, and its role will be as a posting box to introduce those local authorities throughout the Commonwealth which need help to those who can give it—not specifically from Britain; Canada, Australia, India and many other countries have available expertise.

I hope that we can concentrate on the big picture, which is international order and where we can give most practical help to people on the ground. I suspect that through local government and know-how we could make a better contribution than we have made so far.

8.20 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): It is a pleasure to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), which was characteristically thoughtful. It was a Minister's speech and included a speech on Rwanda that probably should have been made by the Minister.

Let us consider what has happened today. We have on the Order Paper a motion that mentions the inadequate response of the Government and the world community to Rwanda, and what has the Minister said? He has simply said that we have given aid and logistical support to the military effort. I see from one of the answers I received today that it is 50 trucks. That is Britain's contribution to Rwanda.

Dr. Kim Howells: It is £500,000.

Mr. Worthington: My hon. Friend on the Front Bench says that it is £500,000. The Secretary-General of the United Nations described what has happened in Rwanda as a tragedy, as deplorable, as a collapse of the world will and as a total failure. He said that the United Nations had failed. If the United Nations has failed, we have failed. It is not Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali; it is the Government and the House of Commons of Britain and of all the countries that contribute to the United Nations.

What kind of House and Government do not seek to make a statement when 500,000 people are slaughtered? Here we are today, debating the tragedy in Opposition time, and the Government have made no attempt to make any statement to the House.

The Minister talked about leadership, about a world position. We are on the Security Council. What kind of leadership do we have when it will not even speak to our House of Commons about the tragedy in Rwanda? What kind of leadership function is that?

Let us take another example. Recently, there was an unparalleled special emergency meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission to consider the genocide that has occurred in Rwanda. Even the Government use the word; it is admitted as genocide. We considered it so special, such an emergency, that we did not even send a Minister. We sent a civil servant to an emergency meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. How many people have to die before it is worth sending a Minister to show our commitment?

What lessons have the Government learnt? I respond to what the hon. Member for Broxtowe said. We cannot go on running famines and wars by committees which take weeks and months to meet. That is what happened in Somalia, Angola and Rwanda. It is a no-no. It is no way of dealing with the problem. It plays into the hands of the Milosevics and of the Government of Rwanda. Such people love to see us behaving in that way.

We also have to consider how the Security Council operates. At the moment, frankly, it looks as if the United Nations is praying for the war to end before the troops get there. The Rwanda Patriotic Front is doing a better job than the United Nations about ending the war and the bloodshed.

We do not even have human rights monitors there at present. The presence of journalists has probably done as much as the presence of the United Nations to stop deaths. Simply to be there and for those in Rwanda to know that the world is looking stops deaths.

We must try to rescue something from this. I hope there will be another occasion when we can have a serious debate about the role of the United Nations Security Council. As the hon. Member for Broxtowe was saying, the United Nations should have a rapid reaction force of people from the nations of the world who have volunteered to join that force and owe it their allegiance.

That will be a difficult operation, but the current difficulty of deciding whether one would be willing to lose a British life in Rwanda would become a different question if those young people had made a commitment to join the United Nations special reaction force. It is the volunteering of a person to do a worthwhile job for the world. There are inadequacies with that, but the position could not be much worse than it is at the moment, and we must try to rescue something.

I want to talk about three things. I have already mentioned the first, the position in Rwanda, but Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali and others are now talking about preventive diplomacy or how we avoid such tragedies and intervene in a helpful way.

I want to talk about one particular country and flag up the fact that problems will occur there. I have just been there, and I think that we will be reading about tragedies there in the next year or two unless we act now. That country is Kenya. All the signs are that there will be a

Government-sponsored civil war there unless we take note of what is happening. I think that Kenya runs the risk of going badly wrong.

One issue I wish we had talked about tonight—and which the Minister can still rectify—is controversial. The Government are quite right to allocate their aid budget to emphasise good governance. That is fundamentally right. There are exceptions to that, in that humanitarian aid has to go to the people in any circumstances, regardless of the goodness or badness of the Government, but if one is giving development aid, in order to justify it to one's constituents, one should make sure that that money is properly applied in a context that respects human rights. I suspect that it is a highly selective policy. In Indonesia, where there are big markets, I suspect that a blind eye is turned to human rights issues.

Let us take Kenya as an example. A couple of years ago, the international community said that enough was enough, and stopped aid and co-operation. It worked to a certain extent, in that President Moi was forced into multi-party elections, which were given an okay verdict by the international observers. However, that verdict was like a verdict in a World Boxing Organisation title fight—very dubious. Many aspects of those elections were highly questionable. For example, in the Rift valley, there were 16 unopposed Kenya African National Union MPs, because no one else could place his nomination papers.

I fear the worst for Kenya because of the gargantuan scale of the corruption and the undermining of the democratic rights of the people. The corruption is on a huge scale. Is there any corruption anywhere to match the scale involved in the Goldenburg scandal? Hundreds of millions of Kenyan shillings were paid to the Goldenburg firm as a reward for doing nothing at all except fill in bogus forms pretending to have exported gold when no gold had left the country.

It is calculated that the scale of the scam amounted to 20 per cent. of the total value of the Kenyan economy. The corruption extends to the most senior levels of the Kenyan Government. What is so wicked is that, just as there is no such thing as a free lunch, so there is no such thing as a free scam. That scam provoked runaway inflation, and those who are suffering most are the millions of Kenyans who live on a pittance.

The Kenyan Government were forced to hold an election, but it was a highly dubious one. Many opposition Members in Kenya have spent lengthy periods in Moi's gaols, and they are constantly harassed. They are not allowed to hold meetings in their constituencies without Government approval, which is often not given. About seven opposition Members have defected recently, and there has been no pretence that they have done so for any reason other than that they have been bought by the Kenyan Government. Millions of shillings have been paid to them to join KANU and stand again, and they are then re-elected with the assistance of Government money.

Kenyan Ministers openly state that no services will be provided in areas that support opposition Members. The courts are not independent. The universities have been on strike for seven months, and any research in a university must have the approval of the President's office.

Of most concern are the ethnic clashes, of which the most serious are in the Rift valley, where 1,500 people are said to have died and 250,000 have been displaced. There seems to be little doubt that Government-organised gangs raid, loot, kill and drive out Kikuyu so that the President's tribe, the Kalenjin, can be dominant and take over the land.

I went to Mtondia, near Mombasa, where 150 young fighters had turned up by coach, killed eight people, burned the village and displaced the villagers. They then threatened to return on 16 June. The fighters were recognised and could easily have been identified. It should have been an easy job for the police, but there was no interest in doing it. Responsible organisations like Africa Watch and Amnesty International have no doubt that the Government were behind the raid. Even *The Economist* intelligence unit says:

> "the overwhelming evidence suggests that the incidents have been provoked by the ruling party at the provincial (and sometimes national) level to clear the affected areas of residents who do not belong to the Kalenjin group of tribes."

The news editor of the *Daily Nation* newspaper has been charged with subversion simply for saying that he had been told by local people that the fighters to whom I referred had arrived by helicopter at the home of a local Member of Parliament. When I objected to that, President Moi was very annoyed. Is commenting on something that has happened interfering in the affairs of an independent state?

President Moi will say that it is colonialism and imperialism. However, I think that there are clear British interests. On the question of Rwanda, the British Government have said, "It is not for us. It is Francophone Africa; it is for the Belgians and the French." The Government cannot say that about Kenya, because that country is an important market, and there is a long tradition of British involvement.

Mr. Lester: Surely the hon. Gentleman shared his views with the British high commissioner in Kenya. I have been long involved with Kenya; indeed, I am chairman of the British-Kenya group in the House. It has always been obvious that, whenever there is a problem in Kenya, the first people the Kenyans want to talk to and want assistance from are the British Government.

Mr. Worthington: I respect the hon. Gentleman's view. However, in recent times, the British Government have spoken far too softly, and have not used their influence in these matters. We shall see whether the United Nations and the British Government can exercise preventive diplomacy. There is no doubt in anyone's mind about the scale of corruption, about the appalling ethnic clashes or about the fact that those are inspired by the Kenyan Government. I want our Government to tell the Kenyan Government, "This is not on."

Next month, a meeting at the World bank will consider the relationship with Kenya. It is legitimate for this country, through its influence at the World bank and bilaterally, to say that the level of human rights abuse in Kenya is unacceptable to the world community. I hope that they do that before we go down a slippery slope.

The other issue I want to raise links with what has already been said—which I fully support—about the international conference on population and development in Cairo in September. We must make a success of that conference.

It is a fundamental right of the women of this world to choose the size of their families. It is cheap technology. Nothing has altered the lives of women in this country more than access to family planning. It has transformed their lives. In sub-Saharan Africa the population doubles

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every 25 years. The current populations of Britain and Egypt are about the same; the difference is that ours will double in about 260 years, whereas Egypt's will double in about 30 years. If ours were to double that quickly, we might concentrate a little harder on the issue.

The country with the slowest rate of population doubling is Italy, where it takes 3,466 years. I do not think that anyone in Italy should tell the women of a country in which the population doubles every 25 years that they cannot enjoy the same facilities as the women of Italy. That is a crucial point. Nothing will do more to help development and to end poverty than arming the women in the poorer parts of the world with good reproductive health facilities and primary education. They want that.

In Sierra Leone, only 4 per cent. of the population have modern family planning services. There was no objection to those services from local Muslims or the Roman Catholic Church; all that was stopping the women was lack of access to them.

I agree with the chairman of the all-party group on population and development, the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), that it is important that the conference in Cairo is successful. There is a coming together of the peoples of the world. The Muslims have altered their views on family planning. It is no longer a rich north world saying to a poor south, "You must not have children." Now, the poor south is saying, "We don't want to have as many children as we did previously. Will you help us with the necessary resources?" I hope that the Cairo conference is a success.

8.29 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am grateful to be allowed to participate in this debate because, due to a constituency engagement, I was not present for the opening speeches. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who devoted part of his speech to the plight of women in the developing world. His was only the third mention of our gender in the speeches that I have heard.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the feeling is increasing among many women throughout the developing world that their family sizes are too large. Who could blame them for thinking that, when infant mortality shows no signs of reducing significantly, many young children die of easily preventable diseases and there is virtually no clean water available to millions of people in this, our one world?

This serious and important issue concerns not just the survival or the development of the third world but the survival of our world in total. We can no longer allow the human poverty, degradation, disease and sheer suffering that we see virtually every night on our television screens. I share the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friends about the thoughtful nature of the speech of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), and I am sorry that he is not in his place to hear me say so.

We have heard of the contributions by governmental and non-governmental organisations and individuals in communities, and of the shameful contribution by our own Government in respect of overseas aid and development. If we, as part of the developed world, genuinely mean to eradicate poverty, make sure that people do not go to bed hungry, and even selfishly want to ensure that, when the UK develops again and makes products for the rest of the world, there will be an increased market for them—one that does not exist currently because developing countries are not creating their own stable economic structures—we must acknowledge that we shall never solve those problems by working separately, in partial or small territorial groups.

I strongly agree with those hon. Members who said that the UN can only achieve as much as the nations of the world commit it to do by finance, material or personnel. The problems are often complex. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie that population control is immensely important, but it is not the only way to free women from the terrible burdens that shackle them.

Women make an immense contribution in their own families, societies and communities—but they are rarely if ever empowered to own land or to borrow money. However, they are infinitely capable of transforming the lives not only of their own families and communities but of regions. Those complex issues are intertwined—particularly in respect of women—in a structure that embraces culture, religion and education. At least five separate issues are contingent upon one possible solution working.

The developed world seems incapable of grasping that there is not one simple solution or even 10, but that there may be 1 million solutions. The co-ordination, bringing together and prioritising of solutions to the dreadful problems that confront the world can only be done by an organisation that all the nations of the world recognise—and one that is in a sense impartial, because it is consistently caring in a particular area. I argue that that organisation is conceivably the United Nations.

I argue equally that, in future, perhaps we cannot regard the UN as centred solely on New York. We might have to consider a UN for certain regions and areas of the world. None of that will be possible unless the developed nations take on board the fact that ours must be the major and central contribution.

Sometimes, I feel that the developed world regards the undeveloped world as a problem impossible to solve—that the most we can do will be inadequate, so the least we can do will be sufficient. I find that totally unacceptable. I believe that the majority of people in this country and throughout the world also find it unacceptable. It seems that only Governments tend to hold back. I sincerely hope that this debate will cause the British Government to reconsider the freezing of the UK's overseas aid budget.

8.45 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): It was with shock and dismay that I learnt recently that hundreds of thousands of pounds from the Overseas Development Administration aid budget had been spent running tax havens in the Caribbean for the benefit of companies and individuals from this and other developed countries so that they may avoid paying tax in Europe and north America.

This year's Foreign Office departmental report states that the purpose of overseas aid is

"to help poorer countries and their peoples improve their standard of life."

In a state of disbelief, I raised the matter with Baroness Chalker. She wrote to me:

"Britain has a duty to ensure that"
the offshore financial industry is
"developed in a responsible manner"—
and that therefore
"it would not be sensible to insist that the Territories met the costs . . . of the UK recruited advisers."

British aid money is paying for an inspector of offshore banks and trust companies, an insurance services adviser and a principal tax adviser in the British Virgin Islands. It is paying also for a superintendent and deputy superintendent of offshore finance and two further financial advisers in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

According to a written answer that I received from the Minister earlier this year, the cost of each post, including salary, accommodation and air fares, is approximately £70,000 per annum. That is the average cost of the technical co-operation officers in those two British dependent territories in the Caribbean. Common sense says that the cost of a teacher or health adviser would be rather less than the cost of weaning a financial adviser from the City.

I do not deny that there have been problems with offshore finance in the Caribbean. There were serious irregularities in the 1980s, when the United States Government complained to the British Government that ill-regulated offshore banks in BDTs in the Caribbean were being used to launder drug money and for other illicit purposes. Members of New Scotland Yard's fraud squad were sent to the Caribbean to investigate. There followed resignations by senior Caribbean politicians, the bringing of criminal charges and convictions.

Against that background, in 1989 the Government acted by calling in Coopers and Lybrand to examine the situation. The Coopers and Lybrand report recommended, among other things, the appointment of advisers. The advisers face a daunting task. There are just two people in the British Virgin Islands, a bank inspector and an insurance adviser, to regulate the affairs of 110,000 offshore companies registered there. The British Virgin Islands has a population of 16,500, but last year alone, 30,000 new offshore companies were registered there.

Regulation is certainly needed. However, why should the cost of that fall on the limited and over-stretched British aid budget? If Britain wants to ensure that tax havens in British dependent territories are properly regulated, and if it wants to defend the Bank of England's reputation for probity, the Bank of England or the Department of Trade and Industry should pay for that.

I believe that the costs should, and certainly could, be borne locally. The British Virgin Islands Government raised £12,660,000 in taxes and charges from their offshore finance industry in 1992-93, but spent only £730,000, including the hand-out from the British aid budget, on regulating that industry. The Turks and Caicos Islands Government raised more than £1.5 million in taxation and charges from offshore finance, but they spent only £200,000 on regulating those offshore companies. The majority of that money came from the British aid budget.

Those territories could well afford to pay to regulate their offshore financial industries. It is not that tax levels are already punitive in the dependent territories. In the British Virgin Islands, income tax ranges from 3 per cent. to a top rate of 20 per cent. Company tax is 15 per cent. on chargeable income and offshore companies are largely exempt from taxation. In the Turks and Caicos Islands, there is no capital gains tax, no income tax and no corporation tax.

It is nothing short of a scandal that hard-pressed British taxpayers, many of whom are on low incomes and who are paying a greater proportion of their income in taxes now than they paid in 1979 under the previous Labour Government, are subsidising a lavish, low-tax lifestyle for Caribbean professionals who work in the offshore finance industry. Their tax contribution to the British aid budget is enabling rich Britons to avoid paying taxes in this country, secure in the knowledge that they have found a safe and well-regulated tax haven abroad.

I recognise that there are dangers in comparing tax rates in developed and under-developed countries. However, the British dependent territories are not poor, third-world countries. The Cayman Islands has a per capita gross domestic product of $20,000. That is higher than that of the United Kingdom, which is $15,800, and it is substantially higher than the GDP per capita in the north of England and in Wales. It pays for regulating its own offshore finance industry, but even so the Cayman Islands, with a higher average income for its population than we enjoy in this country, received £119,000 last year in UK aid.

The British Virgin Islands, as I have said, received substantial aid for running its tax havens. Its per capita GDP is $10,479 which is higher than that in some European Union member states. The British Virgin Islands received £1.2 million in aid from the British overseas aid budget, which works out at £74 per person. I have no doubt that some of that money trickles down to the poor. However, the well-paid local lawyers and bankers who work in the offshore finance industry in the British Virgin Islands do not need a tax handout from the people in this country on lower incomes and higher rates of tax.

I am wholly in favour of overseas aid for other Caribbean Commonwealth countries which have a greater need of aid. St. Vincent has a gross domestic product of $3,647, which is about one third of that of the British Virgin Islands, and it receives £9 per person in aid. Jamaica has an even lower per capita GDP, but it receives £2 per head.

This year's Foreign Office annual report promises to target aid
"on the poorest countries where the problems of development go deepest."
The report also states:
"all of our priority objectives are therefore concerned with poverty reduction."

In her letter to me, Baroness Chalker said that aid for Caribbean tax havens
"does not mean giving any less priority to the poorest."
She then quoted the figures to which the Minister referred at the beginning of the debate. She said that India receives £90 million a year in aid, Bangladesh receives £50 million and Zimbabwe and Zambia each receive £40 million.

However, the Department's own publication, "British Overseas Aid Statistics", tells a different story. On a per person basis, Zambia receives £5 in aid. It has a per capita GDP not of tens of thousands of dollars, but of $744. Zimbabwe receives £4 a head. Bangladesh, which has a per capita GDP of $872, receives 40p per person in aid. India, with a per capita GDP of just over $1,000, receives 10p per person in aid. However, the British Virgin Islands, with a per capita GDP 10 times greater than that of those states, receives £74 per person per year in aid.

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

Where is the justice in that? It directly conflicts with the Minister's stated policy of providing aid to poor countries and to poor people in poor countries. In her letter to me, Baroness Chalker stated:

"80 per cent. of our bilateral aid goes to the poorest developing countries—a higher proportion than any other major donor."

To whom does that aid go? It does not go to the poor. The PIMS system, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) referred earlier, which is the new performance monitoring system in the ODA, reveals that only 10 per cent. of the overseas aid budget is spent on poverty reduction.

Is the ODA serious about its statements in the Foreign Office annual report about targeting aid on the poorest? The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) said that he was confused because 80 per cent. of the British bilateral aid budget was going to the poorest countries, but only 6.6 per cent., according to the UN development programme which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), goes to meeting basic human needs. It is possible to reconcile the two. The money is going to the poorest countries, but it is not going for basic human development in the poorest countries. It is not going to the poor in the poorest countries.

People have been saying for a long time that it is right that aid should be directed at long-term development projects that are run for, and, wherever possible, by, the poorest people in the poorest countries. That principle underpinned Labour's White Paper entitled "More Help for the Poorest" as long ago as 1975. That principle was quietly dropped in 1979 when the Conservatives came to office, but I congratulate them on reinstating it in 1990.

The rhetoric has changed, but when will the reality of our aid programme change? If there was a need to refocus aid on the poorest in the 1970s, when the aid budget was growing in real terms and as a percentage of our national GDP, there is more need now when the aid budget is contracting.

I asked the Library to tell me, at constant prices, what had happened to the British bilateral aid budget since 1979. In 1979, it was £1.6 billion. It is now down to £1 billion, and it is set to fall further. The independent group on British aid, which draws together aid specialists from several development agencies, which hon. Members have praised fulsomely, predicts that that budget will shrink to £900 million by 1996. The technical co-operation element of the aid programme, which is what pays for the tax regulators in the Caribbean, absorbed a third of bilateral aid in 1982. It has risen to half now, from £394 million to £520 million in 1992 prices.

Transferring know-how can be an extremely effective way of improving the living standards of poor people in poor countries, and I welcome that when that is what happens. I have seen largely small-scale development projects in local communities transferring know-how from the United Kingdom to aid their development, but it can also end up enhancing the living standards of third-world elites. Hon. Members have talked about the high incomes and incredible wealth of some people in developing countries.

In its annual report, the Foreign Office says that, in future, technical assistance will be the only aid, in normal circumstances, given to middle-income countries. That suggests that we need a much tighter definition of technical assistance—for example, which projects in middle-income and low-income countries and which technical assistance projects will be supported and which should be avoided in order to ensure that aid reaches those who need it most.

There are good moral reasons for giving aid, and I have focused on them because of what I believe is the shocking immorality of spending aid on running tax havens for the wealthy from the developed world. There are the economic reasons which the Brandt report considered, and there are strategic reasons which are exercising people's attention, particularly now, after the cold war, as people consider where future security risks might come from—for example, from eastern Europe, where there is a danger of economic stagnation and migration to the west and of economic collapse, which will add fuel to the fire of extreme right-wingers when they take over. There is a need for aid, and aid has been given.

There is fear of a deterioration in relationships with the Islamic world, but aid is being given to many Islamic countries in the middle east, to the Yemen, to the west bank, to non-oil producing regions of the middle east, to north Africa, to Algeria, to Egypt, to Tunisia, to Morocco, and to the Muslim countries of west Africa.

People talk about the fear that the twin pressures of population and poverty will force an exodus from black Africa to the north which will threaten our security in Europe. There are two possible responses. There is the fortress Europe response: instead of guarding an east-west frontier, our troops and NATO should line up from Athens to Gibraltar and defend Europe from Africa. There is an alternative approach, which I describe as enlightened self-interest: we use our aid to tackle the problems of poverty, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, so that we reduce those pressures upon Europe.

Do not the Government realise that, when they misuse aid to run tax havens in the Caribbean, they run the risk of undermining the credibility of the whole aid programme with the British people? People in the United Kingdom generally are generous hearted. They understand—some even sympathise—when they pay their taxes that they are providing aid to help the poor, but they do not sympathise with aid to help bankers and tax exiles. The giving of aid for that purpose in the Caribbean will be regarded by the public as the Conservatives misusing public money to help their supporters. It is a scandal, when bilateral aid has been cut, that any of it should be squandered on creating tax breaks. That money—I hope that the Minister will respond to this point—should be switched immediately to provide aid to poor people in poor countries.

9.4 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Throughout this debate, right hon. and hon. Members have identified a whole host of desperate humanitarian problems which fall within the broad spectrum of aid and development. Some, such as Rwanda, lie close to the political end of that spectrum; others, such as debt relief and trading agreements, reflect the sort of debate that the allies conducted 50 years ago as they tackled the problem of reconstructing Europe in the aftermath of the second world war. Perhaps I could begin by drawing the parallel out a little further and suggesting that we could learn a great deal

from the discussions which took place 50 years ago at Bretton Woods, and those which followed in London and New York.

We should recall—and recall quickly—that for the best part of the past 50 years, we employed massive resources, including many of our bravest and most talented men and women, such as scientists, engineers, intelligence staff and the armed forces, and huge amounts of precious public finance in the name of defending liberty and democracy against a Soviet threat. It was an extraordinary mobilisation. Surely it is now time to transmute a small part of that commitment and ingenuity into a new crusade —trying to prevent future Rwandas or, at the very least, to ensure that once such catastrophes begin there can exist among the potential victims at least some hope of rescue or relief.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have made clear, Rwanda is by no means the only horror story unfolding in the world. Terrible wars continue in Angola and Sudan, and scarcely less cruel conflicts rage from Bosnia and the trans-Caucasus through Afghanistan to East Timor. In countries brought to their knees by recent wars, such as Ethiopia, Cambodia and Mozambique, famine and the curses of land mines and smashed infrastructure continue to threaten the revival of civil society and sustainable economies. Indeed, right now, a combination of unreliable weather, extreme poverty and chronic malnutrition hold literally millions of Ethiopians in the shadow of impending starvation.

The terrible civil war against the dictator Mengistu is over and Ethiopia is at peace. As Andrew Timson of the Save the Children Fund points out, however, Ethiopia is getting minimal rewards for doing what the international community wants it to do—liberalising its economy and introducing, however imperfectly, multi-party democracy. The crisis in Ethiopia is acute, and the world must address it if we are to avoid falling back once again on the efforts of charities attempting heroically but often too late to stem the flow of innocent life into the dirt of sub-Saharan Africa.

It is our duty to find a means of breaking the desperate circle of war, poverty and famine. We do not lack the means or the capacity to do it. The incentive, besides common human decency, is the prospect of creating new and more prosperous trading partners. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have confirmed that this country has a great reservoir of talent with huge experience and professionalism in helping developing countries and delivering aid and disaster relief. They and their colleagues in the British armed forces enjoy a world-wide reputation for the high quality of their performance and achievements.

We in this Chamber must try to assist them as they address the questions of how best to devise a means of heading off disasters in the first place, how to judge where best to deploy peacekeeping troops and equipment, how to shift food and supplies into the most needy areas and, infinitely more importantly—as the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) reminded us—how best to encourage and help sub-Saharan Africa and the poorer countries of Asia and Latin America to produce and trade their way into a more prosperous 21st century. Their economic salvation lies primarily in their ability to feed, house, clothe and educate their populations, and to produce tradeable goods and commodities. However, many of those countries are hauling themselves through the painful trials of structural adjustment programmes which, in the short term at least, are causing enhanced levels of unemployment and hardship among populations already hard hit by decades of poverty and inflation. What those countries do not need is another 10 years or so of having to bear the additional burden of monumental debt repayments. To those ends, we must make further progress in tackling the problems of the debt trap, especially in Africa.

All of us welcome the writing off by Britain of £1.1 billion worth of debt. We welcome the initiative taken by the British Government on the issue at the G7 summit in Tokyo last July. However, those are limited measures and we urge the British Government to persuade the G7 countries and other member states of the European Union to extend the work that they have begun on bilateral debt arrangements in order to deal with the debt of countries such as Uganda to multilateral institutions. Her Majesty's Treasury and the World bank still insist that such debt cannot be considered for rescheduling or cancellation.

Clearly, it is farce shading rapidly into tragedy to force countries such as Uganda to seek fresh bilateral loans in order to pay off the interest on their multilateral loans. One of the most important and immediate adjustments in that respect would be for the World bank and the International Monetary Fund to modify their constitutions so that debt cancellation could become a real consideration.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The points that my hon. Friend makes are extremely important. Is it not also true that as a result of the pressure of debt some countries are forced to take decisions which are environmentally unsuitable to them and may have implications for countries in other parts of the world? They may be forced to take that line simply because they need the economic benefits.

Dr. Howells: Indeed, my hon. Friend is right. I remember that he and I examined the problem in the Environment Select Committee. We saw that countries desperate to earn foreign revenue were willing, for example, to take industrial waste that no one else was prepared to touch, and unscrupulous companies in Europe and America were prepared to dump such waste on them. It is important that we understand how developing countries have to degrade themselves environmentally and socially simply to gain foreign currency.

It is encouraging that the World bank acknowledged recently that it must take more radical action on the debt crisis simply because sub-Saharan Africa could not sustain its current levels of debt servicing. The debt arrears of those countries have risen from £12.8 billion in 1987 to almost £40 billion now. In 1992, for example, the developing countries repaid £100 billion in interest on their debts. That was more than twice the amounts that they received in aid. Between 1988 and 1992, the OECD countries cancelled £6.6 billion of debt. Those cancellations were very welcome, but those same countries received £318 billion in debt repayment—48 times as much.

The Government must build on their small but welcome beginnings on debt relief and urge their partners in the G7 and the European Union to address the problem with much more resolve and urgency. That point was made time and again during the debate on the subject last week in another place. Many noble Lords expressed concern about debt, as they did about the detrimental effects that the arms trade and excessive military expenditure have had on the ability of developing countries to escape the debt and poverty trap.

[Dr. Howells]

For example, Lord Desai warned against perpetuating the notion that poverty in the so-called third world was all the fault of the first world and that the third world was a helpless victim. That is not true. A recent United Nations Development Programme report, which Lord Desai helped to draft, criticises equally the Governments of countries which, despite the grinding poverty suffered by most of their populations, find money to spend on armaments when it should be spent on education and health. Lord Desai cited the cases of India and Pakistan, where the money spent on Migs and Mirage jets could have been spent on education, population control and the provision of clean water.

Baroness Chalker acknowledged that excessive military spending can create political and military insecurity and damage development by pre-empting scarce resources. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) reminded us of the terrible consequences of that hard-sell, unregulated trade in arms, and of the trade in land mines. Yet the Department of Trade and Industry's provision of export credits for arms sales continues to rise, at the same time as aid is set to decline in real money terms. That mismatch urgently needs tackling. The most effective way to meet Britain's security objectives is not to arm and train regimes in the third world, but to guarantee international peace and tackle the underlying poverty.

There is a similar mismatch between the rhetoric of donor countries such as ours and our record on trade in general. There has been a welcome, wide-ranging and democratic demand in donor countries for greater accountability when it comes to judging the value for money and quality of funds allocated to aid and development projects. The World bank has demanded greater transparency to allow us to understand the effectiveness of public money spent in that way. Those demands formed part of a series of radical changes in the way in which the World bank disburses loans and grants and the context within which it expects them to be used. I support those changes and see no virtue in handing over funds for which there will be no accountability. It is extremely important that we stress that accountability.

Structural adjustment programmes in the third world have often entailed forcing recipient Governments to open up their markets to world trade and to deregulate considerable areas of administration. It is a miserable fact to have to record, therefore, that donor countries do not necessarily practise in their own countries and within their own trading alliances what they preach abroad.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) pointed out, in the European Union we operate protectionist policies in the form of a barrage of restrictions against third-world producers. At the same time, third-world farmers have to compete locally with imports from Europe, such as beef and sugar, which are heavily subsidised by the common agricultural policy.

The manufacture of clothes and textiles has been identified as one of the few industrial sectors in which poor countries have an opportunity to compete with the rich. Despite the planned 10-year phase-out of the multi-fibre arrangement under the general agreement on tariffs and trade, however, the European Union continues to use that tariff system to limit the opportunities for poor countries to compete. The World Development Movement has calculated that, as a result, third-world producers have been denied up to $35 billion a year—as much as all the western aid put together.

Agricultural producers also suffer from the continuing vast subsidies paid to American and Japanese farmers, in direct contradiction to their rhetoric about the necessity to extend free trade.

The new democracies of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are already demanding that the European Union—the largest and most powerful trading bloc in the world—should open its doors to produce from the east. The Ukraine, once one of the grain-producing centres of the world, finds itself importing subsidised grain from the west and is already reminding us that if we are serious about encouraging the implementation of liberal democracies in that region we had better understand that we cannot buy it with money from the know-how fund, welcome though some of that may be to the eastern Europeans. We must open our agricultural markets to those countries and we had better decide now that it would be better for the Ukrainians and the British alike if the Ukrainians are able to tend their own fields and gardens rather than having to come here as economic refugees seeking our money to tend our gardens for us.

There is every possibility of progress if this country has the will to force through the required changes by making huge savings—savings which are wholly beneficial to all sides—and to begin seriously the work of reducing the crazy levels of expenditure on the common agricultural policy and its Japanese and American equivalents, which are costing European Union member states vast amounts in precious public funds and costing third-world farmers their livelihoods. I do not mind the taunts that we heard earlier from Conservative Members, who for 15 years have allowed that outrageous farce to continue at a cost of tens of billions of pounds to British taxpayers. If the Government want advice about the location of funds to aid the world's poorest people to move towards the UN target figure for contributions, let them look to their semi-detached relationship with the European Union and their failure to intervene to force down those outrageous subsidies.

On the question of European expenditure, will the Minister clarify the Government's position on certain trends which are beginning to manifest themselves in the way in which multilateral aid organisations and, in particular, the European Union are implementing that aid? Much as we may agree with the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester)—I certainly join him—in welcoming the activities of multilateral agencies and especially the co-ordinating role that they play in the distribution and allocation of funds for aid and development, we must be careful to ensure that the considerable allocation of funds from this country can be properly tracked through Brussels and the Commission.

The ODA estimates show significant trends away from the disposal of funds through bilateral channels and into new channels, some of which are rather more opaque in terms of public accountability than some of the bilateral channels. The World bank's annual world development report shows that about £132 billion per year of infrastructure investment in developing countries has greatly increased access to electricity, sanitation, paved roads, telephones and water, but points out that gross

inefficiencies and poor maintenance of those investments have meant that money has been wasted and services have been patchy.

The president of the World bank, Lewis Preston, declared that the emphasis everywhere must be less on cutting ribbons to open new facilities and more on ensuring that those facilities deliver the intended services. The World bank stresses—as hon. Members have stressed today—the importance of involving local people, which is vital. The bank's study of 121 rural water supply projects shows that in Asia, Africa and Latin America, in those projects where participation by the local population was classified as high, 83 per cent. had good maintenance levels and 81 per cent were graded as effective in achieving their goals. Of those where participation was low, 23 per cent. had good maintenance levels and only 8 per cent. were graded as effective.

While non-governmental organisations applauded the World bank's call for more emphasis on maintenance and greater user participation, they said that the bank itself was a part of the problem:

"What proportion of Bank infrastructure lending goes to maintenance? There is no figure in the report,"

said Paul Spray, head of policy at London-based Christian Aid.

Returning to the issue of accountability, as the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) pointed out, in 1993-94 an estimated 45 per cent. of the ODA's expenditure went on multilateral projects by organisations such as the European Commission, and for 1996-97 that estimate is set to rise well above 52 per cent. We are told that the main reasons for this shift are the pledges made at the 1992 Edinburgh European Council, and that the planned allocation of the European Union's aid budget is set to rise from the current figure of around £300 million to almost £750 million by 1996-97. Can the Minister confirm whether our contribution to the European development fund is set to increase by more than 12 per cent. between now and 1996-97 and that under the terms of the Edinburgh agreement the expenditures are legally binding until 1999? That will mean only one thing—that the share of aid allocated to the poorest recipients will shrink.

I am afraid that the figures contradict the claims made by the Minister, the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), that the Government are successfully targeting the very poorest in the world. If they are doing so at the moment, it will not continue. The statistics cannot be welcome news to anyone concerned with aid and development. No one will argue against helping the eastern Europeans and the new democracies of the former Soviet Union and I have argued that it is vital that we do, but there must be no question of a compensatory reduction in our aid programme to the poorest countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The growing refugee problem in those areas is already an enormous drain on the resources of bilateral and multilateral agencies alike. All the briefings that we receive from the United Nations agencies, Oxfam, Actionaid, Save the Children, One World Action and all the other NGOs warn that the world's refugee population has grown substantially. From Bosnia on our doorstep to Afghanistan and Zaire, it is possible that as many as 42 million people worldwide have been displaced by wars and other catastrophes. How much longer will we be prepared to bear witness to their suffering? How much longer will we expect the relief agencies time and again to find the money to ease their pain and hardship?

I welcome the pleas issued by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who stressed the case for greater availability of family planning resources. As they both said, the population of sub-Saharan Africa is doubling every 25 years, and many of those people are in refugee camps. There are 12 million more mouths to feed in Ethiopia than there were just 10 years ago. Surely it is time that we began to concentrate on that dilemma some of the energy, talent and ingenuity—and some of the resources—that for half a century we concentrated on the business of defending liberty and democracy during the years of the cold war. This is as good a time as any to begin that concentration. It is 50 years since D-day intensified the struggle for the liberation of Europe from the chains of fascism, and 50 years since the Bretton Woods agreements which helped to underpin the reconstruction of an entire continent.

In the year when democracy returned to South Africa and Malawi, let us not miss the opportunity to help South Africa to transform the whole southern half of the continent. This is one of the great opportunities in history. We are very lucky to have not only Nelson Mandela but an extraordinary figure in de Klerk. There have been many moments in history when we could have done with people of their calibre; now that we have them it is vital not to regard South Africa as a former trouble spot that we can now safely forget. If we help to make South Africa a success, we shall help to make the entire southern half of that continent a success.

Let us not throw away the opportunity to begin a new crusade against an enemy every bit as insidious and destructive as fascism. The chronic poverty and deprivation of so much of the underdeveloped world are a slur on the name of civilisation. The impotence and disarray of the United Nations Security Council are a negation of the spirit of hope and regeneration which established that organisation after the desperate years of the second world war. The murder of half a million Rwandans—after the murders of so many innocents in Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Liberia, East Timor and a score of other places—leaves a stain on the hands of every one of us.

These are political problems which require political solutions. If we believe that our global agencies and international organisations are not up to the task of developing those solutions, as was argued by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie and the hon. Member for Broxtowe, we must modify and reconstruct them—as the generation that defeated fascism constructed the UN in 1945. We may not succeed in every instance in alleviating debt burdens, encouraging production and opening up trade, heading off wars and denying famine and disease their terrible harvests of human life, but we shall be seen to be trying—to be caring, as we should care for each other on this fragile planet. If we care, and if sometimes we succeed in our great endeavours, we shall bring hope where now there is no hope—and there can be no greater achievement than that.

9.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): This has been an interesting and extensive debate, with many informed contributions. I shall try to answer them all as well as I can. I normally give way quite a few times, but so many hon. Members have spoken tonight that I do not know how often I shall be able to do so.

There has been talk of the need for a White Paper: the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) mentioned it. I shall say more on the subject later, but let me say now that I do not believe that there is another Department of State in Whitehall that is so open with the information that it gives. I should know: I sign all the questions to which right hon. and hon. Members receive answers in this House, and I can only say that the answers are as long as the questions are numerous. I shall give further information to all hon. Members by letter if I do not manage to answer their comments.

The argument advanced by the Labour party was coloured by two characteristics. First, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who opened the debate, and many of his colleagues sought to occupy the moral high ground. Labour Members always want to be up there doing good, but do not demean themselves by suggesting how they will pay for their promises. They think that the accountants and money men will find the money for them to pay for their promises. I must inform them that all those guys occupy a building in Whitehall called Her Majesty's Treasury. The Opposition enjoy the lack of responsibility and the luxury of not being in power. For the sake of our great country, I hope that they continue to enjoy their extravagant fantasies for many years to come from the comfort of the Opposition Benches.

Dr. Godman: The Minister wants a one-party state.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall not comment on the outrageous and foolish suggestion of the hon. Gentleman, who normally speaks better than that.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister said that our policies were theoretical. If the Government have been so successful, why has the proportion of aid fallen from 0.51 per cent. to 0.28 per cent., and why has the rate of growth been slower than under any Government since the war? Why have the Government been unable to match the achievements of the former Labour Government?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman will have to be patient. I intend to deal with the arguments in greater detail later and will pick up his point then.

The second characteristic of Opposition Members' contributions, particularly that of the hon. Member for Monklands, West, whom I respect, is that they have picked up the arguments in the papers which the World Development Movement has issued to all of us. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) had the temerity to repeat the information that he found on the first page of the World Development Movement's press release, which said that opinion polls show that everyone in Britain wants more aid expenditure. But paragraph 4 on the second page gives other statistics. It says that 33 per cent. of people wish to continue to give the current proportion of our national wealth as aid and 33 per cent. want to decrease the proportion. So two thirds of people think that we should either continue to give the same or give less than in the past.

So I say to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central and those who wrote the World Development Movement report that we know what it is all about—lies, damned lies and statistics. It makes no sense at all. In his opening contribution, the hon. Member for Monklands, West gave advance warning of what he was going to say by referring to the arguments of the World Development Movement —the same comments and criticisms—about what we are doing.

The World Development Movement is a lobby. I accept that it has a cause, but a lobby with a cause is a lobby none the less. The hon. Gentleman should not listen so extensively to organisations like the World Development Movement, but should seek information in many of the areas of his concern from the Overseas Development Administration, or, if he prefers, table questions to me, which I shall answer.

I shall make a few general comments. Our aid programme is a high-quality, successful programme. That is not simply my opinion, although I am happy to adopt it. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee completed a review of the British aid programme earlier this year. It said:

"The United Kingdom has a highly concessional, well organised bilateral programme based on substantial national expertise and largely oriented towards the poorest developing countries."

We have heard an awful lot about how we do not help the poorest developing countries. That is not the view of the independent critics in the OECD.

We make extremely good use of taxpayers' money. Far from being a misuse of funds, the aid programme is effective because it is so well targeted. It is well targeted on where we spend our aid—the poorest countries in Africa and Asia. Eighty per cent. of our bilateral aid is targeted on the poorest countries. It is well targeted on clearly defined objectives, set out clearly in the speech of my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development at Chatham house last year.

Our aim is one which everyone in the House will agree as an ultimate objective—long-term sustainable development. Along with the lead we have taken on debt relief and on pushing for freer trade, that helps stability and contributes to the global economy. That is in Britain's interests and the interests of the countries that receive our aid.

I shall give a snapshot of some of the objectives that we support, including economic liberalisation—sound economic policies in other words—which encourage investment and give incentives to produce. We promote the productive capacity of developing countries. We improve management skills in developing countries. We encourage thereby more effective public expenditure programmes in those countries. We promote good government—an objective which hon. Members from both sides of the House of course endorse. We promote good government, to improve legitimacy and accountability, and promote the democratic process and respect for human rights. We are increasingly directing and focusing our programme on the direct reduction of poverty.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: One moment.

We promote human development, including better education and health and access to family planning services. We help poorer countries tackle environmental problems, which were said by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) to be a cause for great concern, with which I agree.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: One moment.

We provide speedy and effective humanitarian assistance. All those objectives strike me as extremely good uses of British taxpayers' money.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Minister has set out a marvellous range of objectives, with which none of us would disagree. The problem is that it is all rhetoric and no delivery. It is no use saying that he promotes good government and stability when he knows perfectly well that in Angola the actions of the British Government are leading to worse government, leading to tremendous humanitarian problems, and indeed, siding with people who do not accept the pluralistic electoral policy that he and his friends supported and indeed brokered.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am sorry that I gave way. If I had not given way, I would have had more time to develop my speech and to give the detail which supports the assertions that I have just made.

I return to the argument of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale that a White Paper was needed. Let me tell the House how we disseminate our information—I say it with some feeling because I am responsible for clearing it before it comes to the House of Commons. My noble Friend the Minister set out our aid strategy clearly in her speech at Chatham house last October—one of about 50 speeches she makes a year about aid. We publish annual departmental reports to Parliament, an annual review of the programme, an annual statistical review of the programme and a range of other booklets about specific aspects. Earlier this month, we launched new strategies on forestry and biodiversity. We are about to do the same on population strategy. *[Interruption.]* I am answering the right hon. Gentleman's request for a White Paper. It belittles the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) to interrupt in that way.

We have done a great deal to improve the flow of information. We have agreed, for instance, that the forthcoming review of the United Kingdom's aid programme by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee should be the first such report to be published in full. It will compare information on the performance of our programmes against our objectives.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who said that we are publishing more information about the aid programme than ever before, in an attempt to make it more transparent and to make a genuine contribution to the debate on development aid issues. I can see no case in those circumstances for a White Paper on aid and related matters.

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to intervene once I have commented on what he had to say. I need to make a great deal of progress if I am to get through my speech, and I shall not be able to give way much more.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West and several other Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), made much of the Trinidad terms. Certainly, the original Trinidad proposals were for a two thirds reduction for countries with a track record of economic reform—but we cannot move unilaterally to that target from 50 per cent. We must do so multilaterally, and we are pressing other creditors to agree to the full Trinidad terms. We must do this in conjunction with others if we are to be effective.

As for multilateral debt, both the IMF and the World bank say that full repayment of debt allows them to continue lending even when other lenders withdraw. The World bank argues that cancelling or rescheduling debt could make it more expensive for the bank to raise money on the world's money markets—money with which to help developing countries.

It is therefore not a question of any stubbornness on our part. Our views are based on what the institutions themselves want. It is most ungenerous of Opposition Members to give no credit to the Prime Minister, who initiated that whole process which is doing so much to help the developing world.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Minister has accused my party of seeking to occupy the high moral ground. I plead guilty: I would not accuse him of that. Why does he believe that the World Development Movement is so far wrong? It enjoys a great deal more support than the Conservative party received in the recent European elections. The Minister sees fit to lecture us about the fig leaf of the Trinidad terms, so will he say why the Government will not explain, in a White Paper, the immorality of spending £300 million on the Pergau dam project, which stinks?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I cannot answer that gibe, save to say that I do not take too seriously a movement that does not even bother to check its own arithmetic.

I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe about debt relief. Of course, we should like better terms to be offered, but, as he recognises, that must be done multilaterally. He is right to stress the need for countries to support the efforts of the United Nations, thereby displaying our collective international will. We should never forget that we are the fourth-largest contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping operations.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)) said that developing countries pay out more than they receive. That is not true. OECD figures show that in 1991 developing countries received £31.4 billion more than they paid out. That is a fact, and I place it on the record.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West spoke about poverty focus and it was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) who, I am sorry to say, is not in her place. It was said that 6.6 per cent. of bilateral aid was spent on human priorities, but that is wrong. The figure for expenditure in 1992 on basic needs was 10 per cent. of bilateral aid, and we are better than the average of all donors in that area.

On the monitoring of poverty, all our aid to the poorest countries is focused on the reduction of poverty. We have set seven priority objectives for the aid programme and they all contribute to sustainable development. We now have a computer-based system for measuring performance against those objectives and we have already made public information from that exercise. We shall publish more

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

information later this year. Again I say that we are publishing more information about our aid programme than has ever been published before.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West asked a specific question to which he wanted a specific answer about the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association. Negotiations on IDA 11 start at the beginning of next year. Decisions on our contribution will be taken in the light of those negotiations. We have been major contributors to IDA and gave £620 million in the period 1993-96.

The subject of Rwanda was considerably developed by the hon. Member for Monklands, West and mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva). It was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who is normally fair and whose constituency I think I pronounced rather more correctly then his Welsh colleague, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells).

Mr. Worthington: The Minister has still got it wrong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman grossly underestimates our contribution to assistance in Rwanda. The 50 trucks that he dismissed so contemptuously are precisely what the Secretary-General asked us to supply, but, of course, we have given £11 million worth of aid for Rwanda and for related situations. My right hon. Friend the Minister dealt with the political aspect at some length, so I shall say only that we were in the forefront in the Security Council in efforts to get an expanded UNAMIR.

As I have said, we have given £11 million worth of aid. We gave £1 million to establish an air bridge into northern Tanzania, £8 million to support NGO operations, which I will not list, and £2 million for strategic planning and management, including health, to the UNHCR and to the United Nations department of humanitarian affairs.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall not give way again. The hon. Gentleman made a long contribution and I must get on with my speech. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way on this occasion, but I shall not do so again.

Mr. Clarke: We are on a serious issue and some of the Minister's earlier answers were rather flippant. Earlier in the debate the House addressed the important issue of Rwanda. Have the Government responded to the French initiative? If they have, have they borne in mind the sensitivities of Africans, including the people of Rwanda?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman mentions the disagreements in the aid lobbies about the French initiative. He said that he did not support it and I know that some of the aid lobbies and the NGOs do not support it either. By touching on that he shows the great complexity and difficulty of some of the circumstances— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked a question and he must let me answer it in my way. He owes me that courtesy and he should not interrupt. The hon. Gentleman illustrates the great difficulties. The answer to his question is that we support the French initiative, but I will not go into it tonight because it was not raised in the debate.

We made a rapid response. When the refugee exodus from Rwanda began at the beginning of May, the ODA went into immediate action. Within 36 hours we had equipment on the ground in Mwanza to establish the air bridge to which I referred, to enable relief supplies to be unloaded from aircraft and transported by road to refugee camps and to keep the runways open with night repair work. The NGO requests were approved within 24 hours.

I must say a word about South Africa because it is such an important development for the whole continent and has deep implications for our aid programme. There is no doubt that South Africa's external financing needs will be met primarily by enhanced export opportunities, by the international financial institutions and, very importantly, by direct private investment. That is why the political stability of South Africa is so very important.

Bilateral donors can best help by providing know-how in targeted areas, as described by my right hon. Friend this afternoon. That is why £100 million, which is a substantial commitment, has been made available over the next three years by the ODA and my right hon. Friend. Of this, some £60 million will be provided through our already well-established bilateral country programme, but the Commonwealth Development Corporation has also been authorised to invest in South Africa and I am sure will make an important contribution to wealth creation in the private sector.

I want to say a word about land mines. I shall touch on all the important issues. All weapons are abhorrent, particularly when used indiscriminately. In the case of land mines, the problem must be their indiscriminate use against civilian populations. The Government are deeply concerned about the effect of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines on civilians. Therefore, Britain supported the resolution in the United Nations General Assembly last year which demanded a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines, which pose a great danger to civilian populations.

The United Kingdom has not produced or exported conventional anti-personnel land mines since 1982. I hope that that clear statement can put to rest so much of the ill-informed comment on the subject.

Mr. Lester: On the subject of land mines, it is good that my hon. Friend has reinforced the point that Britain does not produce them. Those of us who have seen Cambodia, Angola and other parts of the world where land mines have been laid know that not a single one is from Britain. However, we spend thousands of pounds picking up those that others have put down.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to endorse, but I cannot give further details tonight, the enormous amount that we do for de-mining in our aid programme all over the world.

Let me touch upon another point that the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale made about corruption, which is a major problem. We actively support action against it as part of our good government policy and we support the overall objectives of Transparency International to which he referred. We have said that we are prepared to consider financing projects that it may put forward.

May I say a quick word to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who mentioned the Crown Agents? I certainly recognise the valuable role of the Crown Agents in our aid programme and, indeed, in relation to the aid programmes of others, notably Japan. That is a example where the Crown Agents

are helping others while helping themselves and Britain, I am pleased to see that the recent honours lists recognised the bravery of the Crown Agents staff in Bosnia.

I should say something to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). Of course, I agree with him entirely about the valuable role of NGOs and their ability to work with the poorest. If I may disagree with him on one point, he was wrong to say that we channel through our NGOs no more than modest amounts. It was a large sum of money which doubled in just three years from £65 million in 1989-90 to £147 million in 1992-93. He mentioned EC expenditure and the need for proper scrutiny of what is an ever-increasing part of our aid budget. I agree with him wholeheartedly and I wish that I had the time to say more about the issue tonight.

I invite my right hon. Friend to volunteer for European Standing Committee B, which is the forum in which these subjects can be properly debated. The hon. Member for Pontypridd should attend, too. It is where proper, detailed scrutiny should take place. I would say more about bilateral and multilateral aid if I had more time, but I have not.

I must tell the hon. Member for Pontypridd that we are committed to a reform of the common agricultural policy which will cut prices. To the extent that that reduces European Union food exports and increases imports, world prices will rise. That will be good for the developing countries.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) referred to structural adjustment. It is important that we encourage correct policies in developing countries. The considerable development successes over the past three decades—especially, but not solely, in Asia—show the importance of the right policies to encourage wealth creation. Our policies of freer trade, debt relief and well-targeted aid help to provide the framework to allow developing countries to prosper.

I do not have the time to deal with the population question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), which was also touched upon by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). I wish my hon. Friend well in Cairo; I only wish I were going with him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth will be pleased to know that we already over permit on the aid budget in the expectation that not all offers of financial assistance to developing countries will be taken up.

I must say a word or two about aid volume, which has been referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) and for Southport (Mr. Banks), by the hon. Member for Monklands, West and by other hon. Members. No one contributor to our debate, other than my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester, has given recognition to the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that the aid-GNP ratio will be confirmed tomorrow to be 0.31 per cent. That is an OECD figure. It shows that currently Britain's aid contribution is above the average of all donors and that we are one of only seven countries that have increased their aid at present.

It is arrogant and irresponsible of the Opposition constantly to claim that our aid programme is insubstantial and ineffective. It is arrogant because they fail to give credit to the skills and enormous achievements of those engaged in delivering aid and to our officials in the ODA. It is irresponsible because the Labour party aspires to come to power and govern this country, yet it refuses to acknowledge the facts. For example, it will not acknowledge the fact that four leading countries in the world—the United States, Canada, Italy and Germany—three of which are as rich as or richer than us, are this year either cutting or freezing their aid. There was no mention of that from the Opposition. That should be contrasted with the modest increase that we are managing to achieve in our aid programme this year. There was no mention either that ours is the sixth-largest aid programme in the world. Ours is the sixth-largest economy, so we are about par for the course.

Labour always says that it will find some way to increase aid. It wants to occupy the moral high ground. It is the same old assertion, but where would Labour find the money? Would it cut expenditure on social security? Would it raise taxes? If Labour intends to pay for increased aid by economic growth, it will not do that by encouraging railway signalmen to strike.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly:—

The House divided: Ayes 232, Noes 295.

Division No. 272] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.

Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House supports the Government's clear strategy to support sustainable economic and social development, particularly in the poorest countries; commends the lead the Prime Minister has taken through his Trinidad Terms initiative, from which 22 countries now benefit, to reduce the debt burden of developing countries; welcomes the role played by the Government in the successful conclusion of the GATT Uruguay round, which will improve trading opportunities for developing countries and help them generate more of the resources they need for their development; commends its substantial and effective aid programme and in particular the use it makes of the expertise of British institutions, companies and non-governmental organisations; and welcomes the fact that the Government now publishes more information about the aid programme than ever before.

PETITION

Bus Station (Ambleside)

10.16 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It is a great honour for me to present a petition to the House. Perhaps I may be permitted to read it:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland assembled.

The Humble Petition of the many residents of and visitors to our small town of Ambleside in the heart of the Lake District National Park, which is associated with a petition numbering in total 11,721, of whom 3,060 are constituents of The Lakes Parish

Sheweth

That it supports the Lake District National Park Special Planning Board in its decision to reject proposals for the redevelopment as shops of the old Bus Station in the centre of Ambleside on the grounds that it is over-development of a most sensitive site, lacks any bus station facilities, has insufficient car parking spaces, inadequate delivery arrangements, would generate traffic hazards and exacerbate already chronic traffic congestion in the town. Further, that it seeks to achieve a solution of this protracted problem which satisfies the people of Ambleside and its elected representatives and protects the purposes for which the National Park was founded.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to use the powers granted to him by Parliament to call in the plans for his own decision, or in any case to refuse the appeal, in the hope that he will take account of the overwhelming local and national opinion raised against this redevelopment.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity of presenting this petition, which is hugely important to many of my constituents and many people who have a huge love of the Lake district, who see the development as a major threat to one of the jewels of England.

To lie upon the Table.

Metropolitan Police (Obscene Publications Branch)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10.19 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am pleased to have secured the opportunity to raise the anxieties that I and many colleagues on both sides of the House have about the important issue of the future of the obscene publications branch at New Scotland Yard. I am saddened that such a debate is necessary and that the House will have to listen again to a Minister persuading us that all is well and that action arising from the criminal justice Bill will solve all the problems. At least, that is what I expect him to say. I shall be delighted if I am proved wrong.

The Government will be aware that pornography is a multi-million pound industry. Those who work against pornography—the police, Customs and Excise and independent researchers—believe that the material in circulation appears to be becoming more hard-core. A survey reported last week by the university of central Lancashire suggests that computer pornography is available in 10 per cent. of our secondary schools and 2 per cent. of our primary schools. That can be only the start of what is going to become a new outlet for the pornographers, as technology becomes more freely available to our children.

In short, the problem will only get worse unless the Government take decisive action. Last year, I organised an exhibition of the work of the obscene publications branch for Members of both Houses so that they could realise the true extent of the problem of pornography. More than 300 Members attended. They were shocked by what they saw, and commended the commitment and dedication of the personnel of the branch.

The squad does not deal merely with girlie magazines from the newsagent. It deals with the most obscene material available in our nation. Its daily work involves the most perverted of adult pornography, which includes bondage and torture of women, the increasingly graphic computer pornography, and horrific child pornography. It is on the latter area that it has, not surprisingly, chosen to concentrate the majority of its resources. Indeed, the squad has ended the torment of many children.

I am sure that no one in the House tonight would do anything other than thoroughly condemn the increasing amount of pornographic material involving children. All of us agree that everything possible must be done to prosecute those involved.

In my Adjournment debate of May 1993 on the review of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, the then Minister of State acknowledged the place of enforcement in combating the pornographers. He said:

"An effective way of dealing with pornography is to hit the pornographer in the pocket. These people are in this business for profit. Effective enforcement of the law is a good way of dealing with the problem."—[*Official Report*, 4 May 1993; Vol.224, c.164.]

I welcome those comments, and the Government's actions on pornography in the criminal justice Bill, particularly the provisions that increase the enforcement powers of the police, especially on child pornography.

While I would still argue that there should be a fundamental review of the obscenity law, I accepted at face

value the assurance that a central plank in the Government's strategy was effective enforcement of existing law.

Imagine, therefore, my dismay when the Minister of State who will answer the debate tonight acknowledged in March, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), that the future of the obscene publications branch was included in the Metropolitan police Commissioner's review of specialist squads. I received information in April from the internal Metropolitan police magazine, "The Job", which confirmed the plans under review.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is considering whether the excellent and dedicated work done by the squad, in investigating paedophiles, should be undertaken by the already overworked child protection teams. The work done on obscene publications could be devolved to the clubs office in Soho, and the intelligence functions could be transferred to the central intelligence unit.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I congratulate the hon. Lady on gaining this debate on such a crucial subject. May I quickly remind her that, less than 10 years ago, it was unknown for the police to be proactive in such matters: they were always reactive. Child protection teams always have a reactive response. Only the obscene publications branch has been able to weave its way through the constraints of rules of evidence and to pursue people, which has enabled it to be proactive. Out of a United Kingdom police force of about 100,000 officers, only 14 have been occupied in that proactive way. It will be little short of a criminal act if they are dispensed with.

Mrs. Winterton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which was most helpful. He has taken some of the words out of my mouth, and has reinforced the case that I intend to make.

When news of the review came to my attention, I immediately organised an early-day motion to raise awareness of the proposals and to urge the Home Secretary to ensure that the Commissioner abandons those plans, which demonstrate breathtaking foolishness. More than 160 Members signed the motion, and I am delighted to see so many of them here to support me tonight. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary then confirmed that the Commissioner was reviewing all the specialist operations at the Metropolitan police headquarters.

I was a little reassured when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House told me on 21 April that the Home Secretary intends

"to ensure that any changes help, rather than hinder, the fight against pornography and paedophilia."—[*Official Report*, 21 April 1994; Vol. 241, c. 1040.]

How can that be done unless the obscene publications branch is retained as a single unit and strengthened?

I am a naturally trusting person, but when I heard that the branch had been removed from the 1994 edition of the definitive publication, "Police and Constabulary Almanac", even I was suspicious. The Minister's reply to a recent parliamentary question that that was a mistake is, quite honestly, hard to believe.

I am concerned that there will be change for the sake of change as a result of the review. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has written to me, saying:

"there is no question whatever of cutting the resources made available for work against pornography".

I am afraid that that typical, civil service language could cover a multitude of sins—indeed, of internal reshuffles.

I am urging the Government not to dismantle the organisation of the branch, which encompasses the greatest expertise on combating pornography that we have in this country. The vague promise of not reducing resources is, frankly, not enough.

I feel most strongly that the effectiveness of the fight against pornography will be greatly inhibited if it is fragmented. Why? Because there is strength in numbers —the sum of the whole is far greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Together with many colleagues, I believe that the effective way to fight pornography is with a specialised unit that has both national and international contacts. We need a national unit which is able to take an overview of the development of pornography in our schools and on our streets. We need a unit that can investigate child abuse, which often crosses county and national boundaries.

Such investigations place considerable demands on the resources of child protection agencies, and require high levels of strategic and operational co-ordination. We need a unit that can also advise regional vice squads who come across this material less frequently than those in the capital city. The obscene publications branch is a unique national asset. Because of its specialised nature, the branch is able proactively to investigate crimes on the basis of intelligence which can often lead to further crimes being prevented—the very point made by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook).

If the work of the squad is devolved to already pressurised units such as the child protection team, the resources will inevitably become reactive and able to deal with abuse only as it arises. This approach cannot be regarded as

"further strengthening and providing support to those involved in combatting crimes of this nature",

which is the stated Government strategy outlined in a letter from the Home Office to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), one of many Members who have supported this campaign.

Some may object that it is the citizens of London who are financing what is often a national resource. I ask the rhetorical question—is this not also the case for the anti-terrorist squad? Most of the trade in pornography is inevitably centred on the capital, and it is therefore only right that the most prominent squad should be based here.

Computer pornography is a new growth market for pornographers. There are two methods by which individuals are able to obtain this material. The first is on computer disks, which are generally the source of the material found in schools. Secondly, images can be transferred between computers via telephone links. In the increasing global world of computer networks, there is regular traffic in computer data from one side of the world to the other in merely minutes.

In the midst of normal business transactions, there is the vile trade in pornographic images. At the moment, as hon. Members can imagine, this is very difficult to police. The only way to stop it is to target the sources of the material, and this needs international co-operation between police forces. How can this be done if we do not have one central point of expertise with which other national forces can liaise?

[Mrs. Winterton]

I am not alone in my views. As I mentioned, more than 160 hon. Members from all parties supported my motion urging the Home Secretary to ensure that the branch is not disbanded. Many have written to my right hon. and learned Friend personally. Nine peers, including a former Home Office Minister and the chairman of the all-party group on children, wrote to *The Times* expressing their "profound concern" about the proposals, and urging the Government to ensure that the squad was strengthened.

Esther Rantzen, who helped launch the Child Line charity, said:

"I find it almost impossible to believe . . . We should be expanding this unit and allowing its expertise to be used for training other forces."

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has also raised its concerns with hon. Members and believes:

"the loss of the Obscene Publications Branch would seriously limit the effectiveness of professional child protection agencies in London, nationally and internationally. The only people to benefit from such as move would be paedophiles themselves."

No doubt the Minister will tell me that the decision on the operation of the branch is for the Metropolitan police Commissioner. Clearly the day-to-day management is under the responsibility of the Commissioner, but the policy decision to remove such a vital squad must come before the London police authority, which is my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary himself. As he has specifically left that police authority in his hands, I urge him to use his power to ensure that this effective unit is maintained—indeed, strengthened.

The review of the future of the branch is entirely misconceived, and totally at odds with the spirit of the provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. The continuing uncertainties will be a major boost to those involved in the vile trade of child abuse and pornography. Far from being disbanded, the branch should be strengthened and supported as a major plank of law enforcement in the battle against paedophiles and all forms of explicit, degrading and violent pornography.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister says, but I shall only be satisfied with a guarantee that the branch will not be broken up. The icing on the cake would be the Minister's telling the House that he would increase the branch's resources in terms of money, manpower and equipment. I invite him to do so.

10.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office (Mr. Charles Wardle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on securing the debate. As she said, the future of the Metropolitan police obscene publications branch has recently been the subject of much comment, and has given rise to some anxiety—the sort of anxiety that she has expressed so eloquently and articulately. I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify the position, and to put it on the record.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments about the importance of the fight against obscene publications, child pornography and paedophilia. The fact that so many right hon. and hon. Members are present for the debate is also eloquent testimony to the concern felt by the House. I urge my hon. Friends, however, to accept that, while it is, of course, absolutely right to emphasise the importance of the fight against child pornography, it would be wrong to speculate about what will happen in a review that is part and parcel of the operational responsibility of the Metropolitan police Commissioner.

Of course the Commissioner will pay careful attention to the remarks that have been made this evening, and to remarks made by a number of right hon. and hon. Members about the importance of the fight against child pornography; I assure the House that, in that regard, his view does not differ from theirs in any way. But—as I shall explain shortly—it is his responsibility to decide how to deploy his resources to achieve every possible advance in the fight against child pornography as effectively as possible.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. In fact, it was not my design to resort to a discussion of that Bill to bolster what I consider to be manifestly obvious—unanimity on the need to fight this vile offence. As my hon. Friend mentioned the Bill, however, I shall refer to it briefly.

It is precisely because the Government take so seriously the threat posed by the worst kinds of obscene material that we have included important measures against pornography in the Criminal Justice and Public order Bill. We think it vital for the law to keep pace with advances in modern technology such as computer pornography, especially computerised child pornography.

The Bill extends the law to cover those who transmit obscene material between computers, or manufacture or store child pornography on them. It also makes obscenity offences arrestable, and will give the police increased powers to obtain evidence against pornographers. It provides a possible prison sentence for those found in possession of child pornography, and brings the penalties for obscenity offences in Scotland into line with those in England and Wales.

Following recent Government amendments in another place, the Bill also increases penalties for those who supply videos to under-age children or supply unclassified videos, and lays down statutory principles that the British Board of Film Classification must take into account when classifying videos.

In the time available to me, I should like to reassure my hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Members that the Commissioner is seeking to strengthen, not weaken, the fight against pornography and paedophilia. That is what I sought to make clear in my reply of 19 May to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who is in his place this evening, when I said:

"There is no question of any relaxation in the fight by the Metropolitan police against pornography. The opposite is the case."—[*Official Report*, 19 May 1994; Vol. 242, c. 941.]

I repeat that reassurance so that any remaining fears can be allayed.

The Metropolitan police are not reducing their efforts against those deeply unpleasant crimes. Rather, it is trying to improve its performance in dealing with them. The Government will not countenance proposals that would hinder the fight against pornography and paedophilia—and the Commissioner is not looking to make any. The Commissioner well recognises the evils of pornography and associated paedophilia. He and his senior colleagues have repeatedly and unambiguously made it clear that the force is committed to tackling those problems with resources, energy and determination.

The challenge for the Metropolitan police is to build on its successes and do even better.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wardle: I should first like to make some progress; then of course I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Like all well run organisations, the Metropolitan police has recognised that, to react effectively to changing times, it needs to review its structure and organisation. That is a matter for the operational judgment of the chief officer, the Commissioner.

Mrs. Winterton: The Minister has described how successful this country has been in tracking down and bringing pornographers to book. Cannot he accept the simple principle behind this debate: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"? If the structure has been successful in the past, is successful now, has been proactive and is recognised, both nationally and internationally, as successful, why cannot the Commissioner simply say, "I am reviewing certain departments, but the obscene publications branch has a track record second to none, and I have no intentions of altering its structure; in fact, I intend to strengthen it with further resources"?

Mr. Wardle: I understand—as I understood when she spoke initially—and share my hon. Friend's sense of commitment in the fight against child pornography and the like. The principle "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is perfectly sensible as far as it goes, but in any well run organisation it makes sense to review from time to time in order to preserve the strengths and see whether any facets of the organisation could be improved.

It does not mean that everything that is good must be thrown out of the window. There is not an organisation in the world that would not benefit from an occasional review to identify and build on the strengths and see what other strengths can be developed.

I hope that my hon. Friend will now allow me, in the short time available, to continue to develop the theme that I began.

The Commissioner's aim is to improve policing performance and quality of service and to deliver a more effective use of resources, sharper accountability and improved communication and decision-making. That is his responsibility as the chief officer of the Metropolitan police. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that those are important and desirable aims.

We do him a disservice to assume, for reasons that are not entirely clear, that he would want to undo any of the strengths of the Metropolitan police, particularly in that area. It must be good management sense periodically to review an organisation's structure and see whether there are more effective ways of doing any aspect of the job.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made clear, the Government entirely support the Commissioner's review—and it is the Commissioner's review. We want all chief officers to cut unnecessary administration and to put the maximum possible effort into front-line policing and attacks on that type of vile crime.

No one can afford to be complacent about existing structures and organisational methods if they are to keep fit for the fight against crime, and if they are not to allow their organisations to ossify. The police need to ensure that they are organised as effectively as possible to meet new challenges in the most effective way. As my hon. Friend told the House, we are up against some determined and extremely unpleasant criminals in that field. That is why it is so important that the Commissioner should have our support in his review, and that is what it is all about.

It is a pity, therefore, that the Commissioner's aims and methods have been misunderstood in relation to some of the specialist headquarters units, and, unfortunately, recent reports in the media have failed to reflect the policy accurately. I know that the Commissioner has written to some of the newspapers concerned, but, in the way of such things, reassuring letters do not catch headlines, and the public's anxiety has not yet been allayed completely. Perhaps it is understandable that my hon. Friend has expressed herself so forcefully this evening.

I make it absolutely clear that restructuring is not about what the Metropolitan police does. That is a matter for the annual policing plan, as I think my hon. Friend suggested, and that is approved each year by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Restructuring is about how the Metropolitan police organises itself to do what it does. That is a matter for the Commissioner, although, of course, he discusses his proposals with my right hon. and learned Friend.

I shall make three general points. First, the obscene publications branch has not been singled out. All headquarters units are included in the review, and I understand from the Commissioner that the work of the branch is expected to receive at least as much, and perhaps even more, attention in the new arrangements. There is no intention to cut resources or to pull out any functions. That is the view of the man in charge—the Commissioner. I believe that my hon. Friend recently had discussions with the Commissioner about that important subject.

Mrs. Winterton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Wardle: Secondly, the review is in its very early stages. The Commissioner and his senior management team are not yet considering any proposal about the future of the branch, still less a decision. It is wrong, and I think not entirely constructive, to suggest otherwise. I understand the anxiety, but we must give the Commissioner a chance. Indeed, I understand that final decisions about reorganisation are not expected until April next year. All that has been done is to include the obscene publications branch in—or rather, not exclude it from—the restructuring review.

Thirdly, the branch's inclusion in the review is not to be taken as implying any criticism of its present management or operations. My hon. Friend has paid tribute to the successes of the branch. She is right to do so. The officers in the branch do a difficult job very well indeed, and have earned a great deal of respect on both sides of the House.

My hon. Friend spoke about a national role for the Metropolitan police in that regard, and I should like to make a few comments. First, the Metropolitan police does not have an established or continuing national responsibility for operations involving computer pornography. I say that for clarification. It has, however, played an important role in training officers from all forces throughout the country in computer-related crime and the recovery of evidence, but other forces, such as those in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, have their own vice squads with officers and equipment to combat that form of pornography.

[Mr. Wardle]

Secondly, investigation of child pornography and paedophile rings is carried out throughout the country by different forces. Although the Metropolitan police does not have a national role as such, it has long been accepted that it has developed an expertise in that field and, in those circumstances, members of other forces turn to the Met and one another for advice and assistance. That is good practice, and I am sure that it will continue.

In conclusion, although it is too early to speculate about the outcome of the Commissioner's review, I think that it is a logical and correct step to consider possible areas of overlap and possible opportunities for strengthening the organisation, which is precisely what is being undertaken.

The question that confronts the Commissioner is simple: can we, by using our resources differently, do an even better job in fighting that type of crime? That is the question that the Commissioner is addressing, and I hope, after what I have said, that my hon. Friend and right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber this evening will agree that it is an entirely appropriate exercise for him to undertake. I believe that this is a question that all forces must deal with if they are to wage a successful war against crime. Every support and assistance should be given to help to find a valuable and durable answer.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

COMMONS REGISTRATION (EAST SUSSEX) BILL [*Lords*]
Order for Third Reading read.
Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.
Read the Third time and passed, without amendment.

LONDON DOCKLANDS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL [*Lords*] (*By Order*)
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 30 June.

FEDERATION OF STREET TRADERS UNION (LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES ACT 1990) (AMENDMENT) BILL (*By Order*)
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 30 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Moorlands

1. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to promote the new moorland scheme.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): The details of the scheme are under active consideration and we hope to be able to launch the scheme before the end of the year.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Is not the moorland scheme an excellent example of an environmental dimension to farming? Does not the Government's approach contrast starkly with that of the Labour party, which seems all too obsessed with having councillors in charge of farms in the countryside, rather than the farmers who know something about the subject?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in his reading of the Opposition's propaganda on the matter, and his interpretation of it is correct. We attach much importance to the environmental dimension in agriculture, but we want farmers to respond to our many schemes positively.

Mr. Bennett: How much extra public access to moorland will there be under the scheme? Is not it scandalous that vast sums of public money are given to landowners who deny the public access to areas such as the forest of Bowland or the north Yorkshire moors?

Mr. Jack: If the hon. Gentleman has studied the vast number of environmental options available he will know that there are two specific schemes aimed at increasing access, particularly to districts such as environmentally sensitive areas—a subject on which he has probed me at the Dispatch Box. The moorlands scheme is designed to help the regeneration of heather moorland, thus making it much more pleasant for the hon. Gentleman and his friends to walk on.

Food Law Deregulation

2. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received concerning the food law deregulation plan; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Officials in my Department have received a wide range of representations from industry, consumer and enforcement interests regarding the food law deregulation plan.

Mr. Brandreth: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the central purpose of the plan is to protect and inform the British consumer and, at the same time, to ensure that British producers and manufacturers are not disadvantaged by unfair practices?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who gives the exact extent and nature of the plan, which is to ensure that regulation and enforcement are sensible and pragmatic, and in direct proportion to the risks involved without compromising essential public health standards. My hon. Friend is also right to mention the great importance of not allowing business to be swamped with entirely unnecessary, overweening and over-arching bureaucracy.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware that, as part of the relaxation of regulations, a genetically engineered virus which is contaminated with scorpion venom is to be released in a wood in Oxford to improve the growth of cabbages by attacking moths that feed on them? That experiment has greatly upset the Butterfly Conservation Society, which believes that the virus will spread to butterflies. Would not it be safer and more sensible for an experiment to be carried out in which the scorpion venom was fed to members of the Cabinet? Even if that experiment failed, the country might benefit greatly.

Mr. Soames: I have always considered the hon. Gentleman the first genetically modified organism I ever saw. We would never want to do anything to harm butterflies, let alone their societies.

On a more serious note, the hon. Gentleman should be aware that our rules governing experiments to do with genetic engineering of any sort are probably the strictest in the world. The public can have supreme confidence not only in our regulations but in the fact that they are extremely vigorously enforced.

Pigs

4. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has had concerning the trade in pigs and related products in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend and I are in frequent contact with representatives of the farming industry, including those representing pig producers. Most recently, we have had meetings with representatives of the British Pig Association on 19 April and 9 May and with the National Farmers Union on 19 May. On both occasions a wide range of matters was discussed.

Mr. Jones: When the Minister had those talks he must have heard representations about the illegal state aids paid by the French Government to their pig producers. When can United Kingdom producers expect a level playing field vis-a-vis their French counterparts?

Mr. Jack: I can assure the hon. Gentleman, who is right to raise that question, that my right hon. Friend has vigorously taken up the matter with the European Commission. It is investigating all the aids that the French Government were paying their pig producers. We await the outcome, but this is an extremely important matter, and we shall take up any examples of what are deemed to be illegal payments in the Community in this or any other sector.

Mr. Hicks: I hear what my hon. Friend says about the Commission's inquiry, but may I emphasise to him the urgency of the situation? The longer we wait for the outcome of the inquiry—whatever recommendations emerge from it and are subsequently implemented—the longer the United Kingdom pig industry will go on suffering.

Mr. Jack: I certainly understand that. I reiterate that my right hon. Friend has pursued the matter as vigorously as possible. The time that the Commission takes to investigate such matters is always disappointing. Meanwhile, this year we are spending about £14 million on research and development to aid our pig industry.

Mr. Morley: The whole House will be aware of the public concern about standards of transportation for pigs and other animals. I welcome the Government's opposition to the Greek compromise proposals on welfare standards at the Agriculture Council on Monday, but last week the Minister himself described the proposals as a great step forward. Have the Government been converted on the road to Damascus, or have they found themselves, as usual, isolated in the Council?

Mr. Jack: Once my right hon. Friend reached the road to Luxembourg, and had listened to what the fellow travellers on that road had to say, she became convinced that, although the proposals represented some improvement, they were not enough of an improvement. Once she had listened to the debate, she found herself unable to support the proposals in the Agriculture Council.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my hon. Friend accept that another reason why pig farmers are disgruntled is that they have been obliged to implement welfare measures which do not have to be implemented in Europe until after the year 2000? Is not there a case for saying that, if we are to go hand in hand with Europe, we should move in step with Europe and not substantially disadvantage our pig farmers?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend may recall that the original private Member's Bill would have allowed no transition period in which to phase out the stall and tether system, to which I think he refers. Because the Bill was amended, there is now a period for adjustment. Many pig farmers have made representations to us about the financial implications. There could be tax implications, but they are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

Common Agricultural Policy

5. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she next expects to meet her EC counterparts to discuss the further reform of the CAP.

Mr. Jack: At this very moment, my right hon. Friend is negotiating in the Council of Ministers on this very subject.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the proportion of the European Community budget taken up by the common agricultural policy has significantly declined since the late 1980s? However, is not the cost still far too high and should not it be reduced?

Mr. Jack: I entirely agree with the line that my hon. Friend takes. The cost has dropped in recent years—from about 80 per cent. to about 54 per cent. of the Community's budget. The United Kingdom is in the vanguard of those seeking further reforms of the agricultural policy and to reduce the costs to Community taxpayers, to increase competition and to bring down food prices.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Minister ready to repeat the pledge given by the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), that the total cost of the common agricultural policy in the current year, next year and the year after will fall progressively, and, if so, by how much?

Mr. Jack: Once the proposals for reforms have worked through over their three-year period, the cost of the Community's agricultural policy will have dropped by £8 billion—a saving to this country of £1 billion.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister ensure that the Minister also takes into account the agricultural situation of the Maghreb, the Mashraq and the Lomé countries, in reforming the CAP? He has given half that assurance before and I should be grateful if he would give it fully.

Mr. Jack: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a great interest in those important matters. As far as I understand it, those issues are not on the agenda for this Agriculture Council, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend on her return.

Mr. Dafis: Given that there is a need for the reform of the CAP, and in view of the issues already raised, does the Minister accept that that must take the form not simply of swingeing cuts but of redirection of support? Does he accept, at the same time, that we need a policy that will strengthen the countryside and at least maintain the present level of the agricultural population? Does not he see a system of assistance for the entry of young farmers as absolutely integral to that?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman may be interested in the answer to a subsequent question on the entry of young farmers, because it is germane to agricultural tenancy reform. He talks of swingeing cuts, but perhaps he has not looked at exactly what is happening. Under the present

reform package, there is a shift away from direct payment, through schemes such as the intervention fund, for example, to direct payments to farmers especially, which have an encouraging environmental factor. In response to an earlier question, I alluded to the fact that the United Kingdom Government, with their own agri-environment package, will be spending something like £100 million by the financial year 1995-96.

Agriculture Science

6. **Sir John Gorst:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the part science is to play in the future competitiveness of British agriculture.

Mr. Soames: We regularly review our research programme and in February we published a research strategy, which describes how science will contribute to the Ministry's aim of improving the economic performance of the agriculture, food and fishing industries.

Sir John Gorst: Can my hon. Friend give an assurance that everything possible is being done to foster a productive relationship among industry, the Government and the academic world?

Mr. Soames: I am happy to give my hon. Friend such an assurance and I am grateful to him for the phrasing of his question. We foster that relationship through the adoption of clear and foresighted technology and research, largely through the link programmes—the institution through which we seek to improve relationships between industry, academia and Government. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has seven link programmes—three in food and four in agriculture—involving almost £25 million a year. We take seriously our obligation in that matter and I assure my hon. Friend that the situation is exactly as he would wish it to be.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister agree that, if science is not properly harnessed, it can work both ways? Is he aware that, this morning, on the M1 near Bolsover, not far from the Coalite factory, once again, a chemical cloud resulted in danger to motorists and problems for the agriculture in the area? Will he contact the senior inspector of pollution to ensure that he has all the facts and that the incident is dealt with, and that all possible steps are taken to ensure that it does not happen again? It is not the first time.

Mr. Soames: Of course I will certainly undertake exactly what the hon. Gentleman asks. He and I have already been round this course once together as a result of Coalite and I very much hope, and I am sure, that that incident will not be anything like as serious as the previous one, but I shall report to him as soon as I have made inquiries.

Mr. Paice: Does my hon. Friend agree that British competitiveness is seriously affected by whether decisions are made on the strength of genuine scientific knowledge or on emotional claptrap? Will he congratulate the Commission on using scientific evidence, correctly, to prevent the Germans taking further their attack on British beef? Will he encourage it also to use precisely the same scientific approach to such issues as nitrates in lettuce and pesticides in water?

Mr. Soames: As we would expect, my hon. Friend goes to the very core of the problem for the future of science in that sector, which is becoming more and more sophisticated and complex. More and more profound ethical and scientific decisions must be taken with clear-headed foresight and by using the clearly laid down rules that have served us and the Community extremely well. If we move away from science and allow politics to hijack the issue, we will be on a rocky road indeed.

Mr. Alton: Will the Minister ask his departmental scientists to reconsider the use of anabolic steroids for cattle, especially as new evidence from gynaecologists and obstetricians shows that the emission of oestrogen from those substances is causing male infertility? It is one of the major reasons why there has been a 50 per cent. reduction in male fertility over the past 40 years.

Mr. Soames: I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of our scientists. The use of hormones and residues in meat is strictly governed. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, Britain has one of the most sophisticated surveillance programmes in the world. I assure him that, if there is any wrongdoing, we clamp down on it quickly. He has asked a straight scientific question; we shall investigate his remarks and I shall report back to him.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend confirm that his Department is contributing to the technology foresight programme? Will not the partnership among agriculture, industry and the Department be crucial, especially for constituencies such as mine that are heavily involved in both food and confectionary manufacture? Will he further confirm that his Department is happy to work with the Food and Drink Federation in studying the involvement of science in both agriculture and food production?

Mr. Soames: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the categorical assurances that he seeks. His constituency includes an impressive array of companies that would be concerned about such research. The link programme is studying food processing sciences and advanced and hygienic food manufacturing techniques, all of which are critical to the competitiveness of the food and farming industries. We should be proud of those industries which do best of all, and in which we are genuinely world leaders.

Beer Imports

7. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on imports of beer from European Union countries and the effect on the British brewing industry.

Mr. Jack: I understand that the industry estimates that commercial imports fell last year.

Mr. Gapes: Why, then, are tens of thousands of bottles of imported French lager on the shelves of Sainsburys and Tescos throughout the country? People are buying that beer, presumably because the tax level is much lower than it is on our domestically produced beer.

Are not British jobs being put at risk by the dual policy that allows a flood of cheap imported beer—which is good for the consumer, something that I generally favour—

while imposing a regressive tax on domestically produced beer? Just as the Government impose a VAT increase, they are also clobbering ordinary people through the beer tax.

Mr. Jack: It always amazes me when Labour Members want to indulge in knocking the British brewing industry. The hon. Gentleman did not want to tell the House that United Kingdom beer exports rose by 10 per cent. in 1993.

On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I cannot think that there would be any difference in the tax levied, at whatever rate it may be, on French, German or whatever beer sold in the United Kingdom—yet that is what he said. In the second part of his question, the hon. Gentleman alluded to some of the arguments about cross-border shopping. The duty and excise matters relating to that are the province of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, the hon. Gentleman should keep the matter in perspective. The total amount of beer involved in that trade is the equivalent of just 3.5 per cent. of total UK consumption.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: As the subject is something in which my hon. Friend is closely concerned, can he say what would be the cost to the Exchequer of reducing the tax differential on alcohol between ourselves and the French and the Germans to the same level as is enjoyed in those two countries? What realistic chance is there of bringing the two levels of 32p and 4p closer together so that minimum harm is done to the British brewing industry?

Mr. Jack: My hon. and learned Friend's question touches on a wider issue that is beyond the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. However, I shall certainly write on his behalf to my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General to seek his worldly advice.

Mr. Strang: How complacent can the Government get in respect of personal beer imports? Can the Minister contemplate the reverse situation, in which French nationals were able to cross the channel to England and buy wine at much-reduced prices? How long does the Minister think that the French Government would tolerate that? Is not it time that the Government acted to defend Britain's brewing industry and the thousands of jobs that depend on it, directly or indirectly?

Mr. Jack: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should take action to help the British brewing industry, which is precisely why we spent about £2 million on the link programmes to which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary referred earlier, which improved the competitiveness of British brewing, increased exports 10 per cent. in 1993 over 1992 and helped to safeguard jobs. As to the tax issues, it is not a question of complacency. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General has dealt with those issues in extenso in public.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My hon. Friend said that the percentage of beer illegally imported into this country is small at present, but it is increasing dramatically. Will my hon. Friend join me in visiting Calais next weekend, to examine that problem? It appears to be growing and is having an impact on the British brewing industry, and will continue to do so unless immediate action is taken to stem illegal beer imports.

Mr. Jack: I much appreciate my hon. Friend's generosity in offering a free trip to Calais, but he will understand that the needs of my constituents in Fylde must come first. I have been to Calais in the past 12 months and seen the phenomenon to which my hon. Friend referred. Another trip would not necessarily educate me further in that respect. I say again that we must keep the matter in perspective. It is estimated that cross-border shopping for beer represents the equivalent of only 3.5 per cent. of total UK beer consumption. My Department has done what it can to strengthen the competitiveness of British brewing, in the ways that I outlined earlier.

Mr. Hoon: The Minister sought to pass responsibility to the Paymaster General, but he must surely feel concerned about the impact of the growth of personal imports on British hop farmers and on hop production. If the present rate of increase continues, that will have a dramatic effect on the Minister's responsibilities for hop farming.

Mr. Jack: I am obviously concerned, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports the attempts being made by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, through the work of Customs and Excise, to ensure that people play by the rules. There have been changes in import arrangements for the personal consumption of beer, wine and spirits. They are sensible easements in terms of the completion of the single European market, but robust action is taken against those who abuse the rules and who are the main cause of the problem at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend will be aware that a number of directors and workers of the Bass brewery live in the leafy lanes of Lichfield. They are also most concerned about the amount of imported beer entering the United Kingdom for onward sale, when it should be for personal consumption only. However, will my hon. Friend congratulate my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on a number of recent successful prosecutions? My hon. Friend mentioned a 10 per cent. export sales increase, but is he aware that Bass and a number of other breweries are now producing beers specifically for sale in France, with French consumer tastes in mind?

Mr. Jack: I shall certainly pass on my hon. Friend's congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on his successful prosecutions. I congratulate Bass, which recently opened a £61 million brewery for the production of premium and export beers. British brewers are hitting back against the competition.

Common Agricultural Policy

8. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals she has to reduce fraud in the CAP.

Mr. Jack: The Commission has proposed the introduction of sanctions against intervention and export refund fraud. We already have such sanctions for direct payments to farmers. Subject to some clarification and textual changes, we will support this proposal, which aims to penalise fraudsters and reduce fraud.

Mr. Spellar: Has this not taken an inordinately long time, during which thousands of millions of pounds have been ripped off from taxpayers right across the

Community? Does the Minister accept that his reply is extremely complacent in the face of enormous problems, particularly in the southern part of Europe? What does he propose to do about the scandalous behaviour of the tobacco industry, which has produced a product that even I would not smoke and ripped off £500 million a year, a considerable amount of it due to fraud?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman asks what we intend to do about this, but it is a Community matter. If he cares to read the report of a debate in the Scrutiny Committee about the tobacco regime, he will discover that the United Kingdom has been in the lead in proposing measures to deal with the absurdities of that regime. We are in the lead in backing the work of the Court of Auditors and requesting more Community effort to combat fraud. That is why 50 more people are employed at the Department to deal with fraud and why in the past two years the number of frauds and irregularities reported has doubled.

Mr. Garnier: Will my hon. Friend ensure that the 50 people to whom he referred and he and his colleagues give every support to the work of the European Court of Auditors, so that the fraud being noticed throughout the Community is dealt with forcefully and impartially not only at the centre of the Union but by every member of it?

Mr. Jack: I will certainly do that. One of the important features to note from the work of the Court of Auditors is the role that the Commission can now play in ensuring that member states play by the rules because of the imposition of disallowance—the recovery of moneys which should not have been paid out. That certainly concentrates the minds of member states and we strongly support further action in that area.

Potato Marketing Board

10. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made concerning the future of the potato marketing board; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Following my right hon. Friend's announcement that the potato marketing scheme will end in 1997, the board is pressing ahead with the changes to the scheme which will allow growers to prepare for the free market.

Mr. Butler: Is my hon. Friend aware that a number of growers are seeking a poll under the terms of the Agriculture Marketing Act 1958 to revoke the potato marketing scheme? Does he view with equanimity the prospect of our being one of the few large potato-growing countries in Europe without an organised market for potatoes and potato products? Does he have any suggestions that growers might like to consider in terms of how they proceed in this matter?

Mr. Jack: I view with enthusiasm the change to the potato marketing regime as a result of the Agriculture Act 1993. My right hon. Friend proposed an orderly change in the present arrangements. Some potato growers have said that they want to conduct a poll and there are procedures for that. It is for growers to decide whether they wish to vote. If they vote for the removal of the board, it will go out of existence straight away. If they vote against, there are further options for the existing potato marketing board to propose successor schemes to the present arrangement—for example, a development council for the industry.

Mr. Foulkes: May I tell the Minister that the proposal is not welcomed by the potato growers in Ayrshire in my constituency, who produce some of the finest early potatoes in the shops now? *[Interruption.]* The ones grown by the sea come ready salted, which is a great advantage. Since the proposal will not come into effect until 1997, will the Minister give an assurance that nothing irrevocable will be done in the next two years, so that the Labour Government can ensure that the potato marketing board continues as at present?

Mr. Jack: If that is the best first early that the hon. Gentleman can produce, I suggest that it should stay in the ground. He should realise that the world has moved on and that Britain's potato growers and producers of potato products have been disadvantaged by the existing marketing arrangements. The flexibility that my right hon. Friend the Minister introduced as a result of the Agriculture Act 1993 has shown itself in the way in which potato growers have already modified the area under cultivation this year, in the light of market conditions. They have also taken advantage of the processing contracts available. That reveals the way in which potato consumption is going and such change benefits all those in the potato industry.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: May I urge my hon. Friend to press ahead with the reorganisation of the potato marketing board? He will be aware of the 500,000 tonnes of processed product that is imported into this country every year, which means that farmers could produce an extra 20,000 acres of potatoes in this country and there could be considerable extra jobs in the processing industry. Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend to proceed with the reorganisation as soon as possible.

Mr. Jack: I thank my hon. Friend for his perceptive and commercially based comments. They stand in stark contrast to the views that we have heard from the Opposition, who seem not to be concerned about the interests of farmers or those who work in the industry producing potato products. I endorse strongly what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Is not the reform of potato marketing really preparing the way for the European Union, through the common agricultural policy, to create a new regime and to control potatoes in the European Community?

Mr. Jack: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern about that. If there were to be anything at Community level, the most that one could expect would be something dealing with common standards and that is a long way off. We must press on with these reforms for the benefit of the entire potato industry.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Is my hon. Friend aware that it is not only in Ayrshire that the potato growers are keen to keep the potato marketing scheme, but also in Lincolnshire? Growers there are under the impression that when the scheme comes to an end in 1997 it is likely to be followed by a European potato regime. Is any progress being made in the establishment of that?

Mr. Jack: We do not want to see some sort of command economy regime to replace what the potato marketing board represented. If there is not a vote to remove the PMB straight away, the future of the scheme is a matter for members of the potato industry to decide in consultation with the board.

Agriculture (Eastern Europe)

11. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effect the development of agriculture in eastern Europe will have on the European Union.

Mr. Soames: Technical improvements, and the development of market-oriented production systems could enable the farming industries of central and eastern European countries to pose a significant competitive challenge. Preferential access to EU markets under the Europe agreements will contribute to this.

Mr. Dunn: Can my hon. Friend confirm that it would be impossible to extend the common agricultural policy as it now stands to eastern and central Europe? Is that not a further good reason for seeking to reform the CAP so as to bring it nearer to the market?

Mr. Soames: I agree with my hon. Friend. Enlargement of the European Union to the east would involve unsustainable budgetary costs if the CAP remained in its present form. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the United Kingdom Government are leading efforts within the European Union to continue to bring the CAP closer to real world markets. I think that there is increasingly a more general understanding within the Community that unless those steps are taken, the CAP will disappear up its own fundamental.

Agricultural Exports

12. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to improve the competitiveness of United Kingdom agricultural exports.

Mr. Jack: Help to improve the competitiveness of UK agricultural exports will come through our continuing support of "Food From Britain," MAFF's continental challenge, our export promotion division, and the programmes outlined in the White Paper, "Competitiveness—Helping Business to Win".

Mr. Clappison: Does my hon. Friend agree that although the British food industry has reduced the food trade gap by half since the 1960s, many opportunities remain for the industry to close the gap still further and should not the industry receive every encouragement to do so?

Mr. Jack: We are certainly trying to give a lot of encouragement to the food and farming industry to help close the trade gap. It is interesting to note that in the last decade the value of our exports of food, animal feed and drink has increased by 50 per cent. and the schemes that I outlined in my initial reply are all available to those in food and farming to assist with exports. We are backing this up as a ministerial team by going to some of the most rapidly expanding markets in the world, such as China and India, to promote our exports.

Mr. Grocott: Given that the Government's record in promoting trade in industrial products has been one of turning a huge surplus under Labour in 1979 to a massive deficit in the latest figures under the Tories, does the hon. Gentleman share my severe doubts about the Government's competence to do anything about agricultural exports?

Mr. Jack: Absolutely not. The hon. Gentleman was clearly not listening to the argument that I advanced a moment ago, so I will repeat it: exports of food, animal feed and drink have increased in value over the past decade by 50 per cent. As a result of MAFF's trade promotion activities, we alone in recent years have done something like an additional £55 million worth of business by going out and pathfinding our way to new markets.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be concerned to ensure that opportunities in the United Kingdom's agricultural sector are not closed by too strict an application of quotas through the common agricultural policy? We have the most efficient sugar regime and probably the most effective and efficient dairy regime, but our quota is less than our national consumption.

Mr. Jack: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. He will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister has continually emphasised our objective, which is to see the quotas and restrictions on production removed. We have an extremely efficient agriculture industry, especially in the spheres that my hon. Friend mentioned, and we should very much like them to have the opportunity to prove what they can do in world markets.

Animal Exports

13. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to reduce the international trade in live animals for slaughter.

Mr. Soames: Trade in live animals is a commercial matter, subject to the necessary safeguards for animal welfare and health. The question of further safeguards for animals in transport was discussed at the Agriculture Council on 20 June, when the United Kingdom received an undertaking from the Commission to bring forward further proposals on journey limits.

Dr. Jones: Most people in this country will be disappointed by the Minister's reply. Why do not the Government support the proposal made by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which is now apparently also advocated by Germany, to impose an eight-hour journey limit for animals and so put a stop to this evil trade?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady should not make the mistake of simplifying the matter beyond what is reasonable in difficult and technical negotiations. The Government have always acknowledged that journey times have a relevant role to play, but they are not the be-all and end-all of animal transport. We are beginning to make significant progress within the Community. The Commission has come up with new plans which we believe will significantly improve the proposals that we first saw on the table at the beginning of the week. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister took absolutely the right

decision to vote with the Germans and the others, pending the proposals from the Commission which will be received early next year.

Mr. Marland: Is this not is a good opportunity to remind the House that all farmers and others in this country dealing with animals have the greatest respect for their own livestock and that problems with the transport of live animals occur not in this country but elsewhere? Will he remind the House of our very high standards and encourage the RSPCA and others not to peddle their views with the aid of appalling photographs which were obviously taken overseas but to carry out their activities where they can do some good instead of trying to suck up to their members in this country?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is quite right. The standard of animal welfare in this country is probably the highest in the world. It is a matter of pride to the British people that they have such attitudes, and it is their wish and that of their Government that we should improve the lot of travelling animals throughout the European Union. That can happen only if there is a cultural and attitudinal change in the Community. My hon. Friend is right to say that the RSPCA and others have a great deal of work to do in Europe and we remain convinced that their task is in Europe.

Dr. Strang: Returning to the Luxembourg Council meeting this week, is it not true that last weekend Ministers were minded to vote for the Greek presidency's compromise, which would allow animals to travel for no fewer than 22 hours before being rested and fed—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen to this. The Government changed their mind only on the Monday morning after the Belgian Government said at the meeting of permanent representatives that they would join Germany, Denmark and Holland and vote against it. The Government changed their mind because there would have been a blocking minority vote of 23. Does that not prove the Government's duplicity and scant regard for the welfare of animals?

Mr. Soames: Even by the hon. Gentleman's standards of rant, that is going a bit far. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition have made a fine choice in the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). Perhaps I may rehearse the truth of what actually happened. My right hon. Friend the Minister asked me to see the animal welfare bodies ahead of the Council as a courtesy, to outline to them the state of the negotiation on the paper submitted by the Greek presidency. Accordingly, at the negotiation, my right hon. Friend listened with great care to the way the negotiation was going and, seeing an opportunity to better what was on the table, and accepting the Commission's offer to develop the idea and work on journey limits, my right hon. Friend went along with what was proposed. To my mind, she took an important step forward for animal welfare. The hon. Gentleman must do better than that if he hopes to convince anyone.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

This morning, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. This afternoon, he is travelling to Corfu for the European Council. I understand that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) is also in Corfu attending some kind of fringe meeting.

Mr. Davies: On the eve of the Corfu summit, does my right hon. Friend agree that Great Britain is leading the way in Europe in deregulation, privatisation, competitivity and growth, and, above all, the vital task of bringing down unemployment but that the Labour party would reverse all those things in very short order?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Those issues are very much at the top of the Corfu agenda as a result of the British Government's efforts to advance those causes in Europe over a long period of time. I am glad to say that the forthcoming German presidency will be pursuing the British objectives of competitiveness and deregulation in its policies towards Europe.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Given that more than a million of our fellow citizens are on national health service waiting lists, can it really be the Secretary of State for Health's vision for the future to get rid of 50,000 hospital beds?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the effect of the Government's reforms on the health service has been greatly to increase the number of people treated and that NHS hospitals now treat 121 patients for every 100 treated before. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health drew attention to the possible continuation of those trends in future years, building on advances in treatment to treat yet more people.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Leader of the House has not really answered the question. Would it not be better to get rid of the waiting lists rather than getting rid of the hospital beds? Are not the cuts being driven by the Government's failure properly to manage public finances?

Mr. Newton: The changes are being driven by the Government's determination to get more patients treated more effectively with shorter waiting times, and the policies are succeeding; if there is a failure, it is the failure of the Opposition to recognise the success of those policies.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: That will not do. We have had massive tax increases under the Conservatives since the last general election and the British people now face massive cuts in services. Why is it that in Tory Britain we have to pay a lot more to get a lot less?

Mr. Newton: The Government have consistently put additional resources in real terms into Britain's national health service. The result of those increased resources is an improving service treating more and more patients more effectively with shorter waiting times.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Can my right hon. Friend recall whether at any time in the past 15 years any Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has condemned any public sector strike?

Madam Speaker: Order. I gave a little homily only a few days ago, but I think I shall have to ask the Whips to hold weekend seminars to instruct Members on what Question Time is all about: it is to seek information on Government policies and to press for action.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Can my right hon. Friend tell us whether any public sector strike which would damage this country, and which has been condemned by the Government, has also been condemned by the Opposition? If not, should not the British public remember that at the next general election?

Mr. Newton: On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I can perhaps offer that the Whips will run a seminar on Corfu for the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) in the hope of getting from her the answer that we have conspicuously failed to get in the House.

Q2. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pickthall: Does the Leader of the House share the general pleasure that justice has been done in the case of Professor Tim Brighouse, who is to receive substantial damages from the Secretary of State for Education? Will he assure the House that not one penny of the damages or the costs will come from the taxpayer? Before his right hon. Friend leaves office shortly, will he urge him to apologise to all the other people involved in education whom he has gratuitously insulted over the past couple of years?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend has straightforwardly apologised and agreed reparation for the remarks to which the hon. Gentleman refers. In my judgment, at least, the matter should be left there. It does not in any way affect my right hon. Friend's ability to advance the Government's very successful education policy.

Q3. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the Government's most successful policies is the right to buy, which has enabled more than 1.5 million former tenants to enjoy the benefits of owner-occupation? Is he further aware that over the past five years a further 250,000 homes have been privately let? Would it not be an excellent long-term investment if the Prime Minister exercised the right to buy No. 10 Downing street?

Mr. Newton: I certainly share my hon. Friend's view that the right to buy has been a hugely successful policy over more than a decade now, together with the Government's successful policies to increase the amount of rented accommodation, and to tackle the problem of rough sleepers in London. As for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I do not know about the right to buy, but I am sure that he will exercise his right to extend the lease.

Q4. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Lord President draw to the attention of the Prime Minister the problem—indeed, the scandal—of court cheats who have been instructed by judges to compensate the victims of their crimes, but who refuse to pay? Is he aware that about two thirds of victims who have had awards of compensation made in their favour against the criminal are not receiving a penny? Is it not time that the Government ceased to be mealy mouthed about the problem and took action to ensure that the victims get compensation and the courts pursue the criminal?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the general steps that the Government are taking to improve the detection of crime and the enforcement of the law. However, he made a slightly separate and very serious point, to which I shall respond appropriately. The right course is for me to invite the Home Secretary to examine the hon. Gentleman's remarks and to consider what response might be made.

Q5. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clappison: On the subject of the pursuit of the criminal, is my right hon. Friend aware that there has been a reduction of 16 per cent. in residential burglaries in the Metropolitan police area? Should not the good work of the police be supported by the courts handing down stiff prison sentences to house burglars? Is that not the message that we should be sending out, rather than arguing about whether prison works as the Opposition home affairs team do?

Mr. Newton: I whole-heartedly endorse the thoughts of my hon. Friend in terms of what needs to be done to continue and strengthen the fight against crime, not least burglaries. Happily, there are beginning to be some encouraging signs that the increase in crime is not irreversible. Alongside other things, there have been some welcome cases of a drop in the number of insurance claims —another sign of police success in the fight against crime.

Q6. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Jones: Talking about fringe meetings, will the Lord President now answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) and give the House a categorical assurance that not one penny of taxpayers' money will go to bail out the Secretary of State for Education, although Labour Members believe in the redistribution of wealth and would have no objection to the Cabinet having a whip round for their no doubt soon to be ex-colleague?

Mr. Newton: I have already commented on that and made it clear that it was a private matter.

Q7. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Michael Neubert: Should we not pause to pay tribute to the astonishing turn of events that has brought the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia into a partnership for peace with NATO? Is there not a lesson to be drawn to the effect that our national security must be defended at all times by resolute and resourceful defence and that the best guarantee of that is a Conservative Government?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. The agreement signed in Brussels yesterday is an important step forward and symbolises, if further symbolisation were needed, the changes that have been going on in the former Soviet Union and sets a new framework for peaceful co-operation between Russia and NATO. Russia is the 21st nation to sign the partnership for peace agreement. I agree with my hon. Friend that it illustrates the rewards that have come from the resolute stance that the Government have adopted.

Mr. Loyden: Will the Leader of the House remind the Prime Minister that the letter regarding MV Derbyshire that I sent to him about three weeks ago has not yet been answered? Does he agree that there is widespread concern in the House about the continuing absence of a Government response to questions and early-day motions on that matter? Will he convey to the Prime Minister the urgent need for a decision to be made so that the work now started can continue and, one hopes, result in a final exposition of the reasons why the MV Derbyshire sank?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is probably aware of the position. As I said in business questions last week, I well understand the concern of those involved. The chief inspector of marine accidents is to request findings and results of the search from the International Transport Federation. On examination of that material, the chief inspector will advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport whether there is justification for reopening the investigation. That measured way is the right way in which to proceed.

Q8. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brazier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at a time when our regular armed forces are facing yet another round of reductions, many of us are deeply concerned that we may also be looking at a further substantial cut in the Territorial Army? Is it not true that the last two major conflicts in which we have been involved—the Falklands and the Gulf—both came from nowhere and both happened at short notice and without any warning? Surely the most cost-effective way of maintaining a reserve for the unexpected at a low level of cost is by maintaining strong, well-equipped and well-trained volunteer reserve forces.

Mr. Newton: The Government whole-heartedly agree with my hon. Friend about the need for increased use of the reserves and share the importance that he attaches to them. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has instituted a pilot scheme, under which he is addressing the possibility of bringing the reserve forces legislation up to date. On the wider issue, I can only repeat what my right hon. and learned Friend and others have said on a number of occasions: that the purpose of the exercise on which the Government are engaged is generally to ensure the maximum emphasis on our front-line forces, and the capabilities about which my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is concerned, and to ensure that we do not spend unnecessary amounts on support services at the expense of those front-line forces.

Mr. Tony Banks: Referring back to those soon to be ex-colleagues, does the Lord President believe that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) will still be leader of the Conservative party at Christmas and that he himself will still be in the Cabinet?

Mr. Newton: I have already referred to my expectation that my right hon. Friend will renew his lease, as I put it, on No.10 Downing street. On the other matters, I am always confident of my right hon. Friend's judgment.

Non-State Pensions

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the White Paper that I am publishing today, which will, I believe, strengthen the whole pensions industry by providing the three basic essentials of security, equality and choice.

Pensions are one of the most important ways in which people and families hold a stake in this country. They are part of the fabric of a property-owning democracy—a fabric which we extended during the 1980s to cover large numbers left out before. I want to encourage more provision by more companies, by men and women, by young and old.

We need legislation to help that process. We have three factors to deal with. First, confidence in occupational pension schemes was hit by the Maxwell affair; we are going to restore it. Secondly, European Court rulings require schemes to give equal pension rights for men and women; we intend to assist schemes do just that. Thirdly, we are committed to making personal pensions more attractive to a wider age range by bringing in age-related rebates. Now is the time to honour that pledge. And we shall also give those who invest in personal pensions greater choice about when they convert their investments into annuities.

My top priority is to restore confidence in the security of pension funds. Following the Maxwell affair, I set up the pension law review committee under Professor Goode. Its report has been widely welcomed—and rightly so. I have since been consulting on its recommendations. As a result, I have decided to implement all the committee's main recommendations. We will reinforce trust law as the basis for pensions law; we will bring the management of all schemes up to the level of best practice; we will give members more influence in the running of their schemes; we will introduce a minimum solvency requirement to ensure the adequacy of pension fund assets; we will appoint a strong regulator; and we will set up a compensation scheme.

As the Goode committee and the Social Security Select Committee recognised, the great majority of schemes are secure and well run. We must not burden them with over-complex administration or unnecessary extra costs. The arrangements that I propose will achieve the security that the pension law review committee intended, while minimising burdens on pension schemes.

I do not believe that any single measure can provide a satisfactory defence against fraud. It is better to strengthen every possible line of defence. The first such line is the scheme members. They have the greatest interest in ensuring that their scheme is well run, so I will give members the right to clear and relevant information, the right to select at least a third of the trustees and access to a procedure to resolve disputes.

The second line of defence is the trustees. Pension funds will continue to operate under trust law, so the role of trustees is crucial. I will make it clear that their role is quite distinct from that of the employer and will set out clearer guidelines for their day-to-day management of schemes. I will give the pensions ombudsman new powers to resolve disputes between employers and trustees. Trustees who are scheme members will be entitled to paid time off for training and trustees' meetings.

The third line of defence lies with the professionals—such as the auditors and actuaries. They will report to the trustees, not the employer, and will have a duty to whistleblow to the regulator.

The fourth line of defence is solvency. I agree with the pension law review committee that a minimum solvency requirement is needed to make sure that funds are available to provide the pensions promised to employees. The Institute and the Faculty of Actuaries have suggested modifications of the pension law review committee's proposal for valuing pension scheme liabilities. After consulting widely, I have taken the actuaries' approach on board. The vast majority of schemes already meet such a solvency requirement. I propose a transition period of five years to help other schemes adjust. From then on, any scheme that falls below the requirement will have three years to reach 100 per cent. solvency. I think that that is fair, prudent and right.

The fifth line of defence will be the new regulator. It would be neither feasible nor desirable for any regulator to police more than 150,000 schemes on a daily basis. A regulator should not have to dissipate energy on unnecessary bureaucracy among the vast majority of well-run schemes. Instead, a regulator should focus on schemes where there is some reason for unease, ready to take swift and decisive action. The regulator that I propose will have powers giving the full force of the pension law review committee's recommendations: the power to make schemes comply with their statutory obligations; the power to impose sanctions; the power to carry out spot checks; and the power to suspend and disqualify trustees. The regulator will be tough, incisive and able to act at the first sign of trouble.

If, despite all those measures, fraud occurs and the employer is insolvent and cannot meet the loss, members will none the less be protected by a compensation scheme. It will be administered by an independent compensation board, chaired by the pensions ombudsman. The regulator and the compensation board will be completely independent of each other. Both will be funded by a levy on pension schemes.

A more insidious threat to the value of pensions than fraud or theft is inflation. The best cure for that is low inflation. Inflation is now at its lowest for a generation and the Government are determined to keep it low. At present, there is no obligation to protect the whole pension against inflation. I propose that the whole of any occupational or appropriate personal pension rights built up after 1997 must be in line with inflation, up to 5 per cent. a year. As now, schemes may choose to go further. Early leavers from salary-related schemes will have the whole of their deferred pension revalued on a similar basis and we will require more consistent valuation and more efficient administration of transfer rights.

In salary-related schemes, the employer is responsible for making good any deficit that may emerge in a scheme, to enable it to fulfil the pension promise. So it is reasonable that employers should still be able to receive payments from any surplus that builds up. But the circumstances in which that is permitted will be strictly defined in legislation and members will have a right of appeal to the regulator.

The proposals that I have just described relate primarily to occupational pensions. There have also been concerns over the way in which personal pensions appear to have been sold. The Securities and Investments Board has been investigating the problem and will announce its findings in the next few weeks. The board has already made it clear that it will require those responsible for mis-selling to remedy the consequences. For some people who were badly advised to transfer to a personal pension, one possible remedy would be to transfer back into their former occupational scheme. However, even if the scheme is willing to accept them back, it cannot legally restore their protected rights. I will lay regulations shortly to enable those occupational pension schemes who wish to do so, to do just that.

In December, I announced plans to equalise the state pension ages for men and women by the year 2020. Many occupational pension schemes mirror the different state pension ages. It would be natural and easiest for them to equalise in parallel with the state scheme. Indeed, the 1986 European directive on equal treatment explicitly permits private occupational pension schemes to retain unequal ages as long as the state scheme does. However, in 1990, the European Court of Justice overruled that, and required occupational schemes to equalise pension rights immediately. It is very difficult for contracted-out schemes to equalise because they are also required to provide guaranteed minimum pensions mirroring the pensions payable in the state earnings-related pension scheme which, of course, will remain unequal until the year 2020.

I, therefore, propose to make it easier for contracted-out occupational schemes to achieve equality. I propose to replace the current requirement to provide a guaranteed minimum pension with a simpler test of overall quality. Schemes will have to provide benefits at least as good as SERPS. In the long run, that will also simplify and reduce the burden of regulation. SERPS will no longer provide top-up indexation for contracted-out schemes. To reflect that, the rebate will be set higher than it otherwise would have been. SERPS expenditure will be lower in the long term because of those changes and because I will also correct an anomaly in the way that SERPS is calculated. I am also protecting women's pension rights for paid maternity leave. Those steps will bring equal treatment to occupational schemes while minimising complexity for employers.

Our pension reforms in the 1980s did a great deal to extend choice. I intend to widen choice further in two areas. At present, someone with a personal pension who wants to take their tax-free lump sum from it must convert the whole of the rest of the fund to an annuity at the same time. As a result, they may be forced to take out an annuity when terms are unfavourable. I intend to allow people to defer taking an annuity up to the age of 75, even if they have taken their lump sum or drawn an income from the fund.

I can also announce today the fulfilment of our manifesto commitment to make personal pensions more attractive across a broader age range. I intend to introduce a system of age-related rebates, which will give people the opportunity to maintain personal pensions for the whole of their working life. I will also introduce age-related rebates for contracted-out occupational money-purchase schemes.

I intend to bring forward legislation at the first available opportunity, to allow schemes time to prepare for the new arrangements. My aim is that the changes should mostly come into effect in April 1997. The views of the scheme members, employers and the pension industry will be vital in deciding the best way of implementing those policies. My Department will, therefore, continue to discuss the details with interested parties.

Funded private pensions are another field in which Britain is a world leader. Funds invested by British pension schemes on behalf of British people exceed those of all our European partners put together. As a result, we are far better placed to face the growth in the number of retired people next century without imposing a huge tax burden on this country. Our proposals pave the way to the next century. They implement the substance of the pension law review committee's recommendations. They allow occupational schemes to provide equal treatment between men and women in a way that minimises complexity. They extend choice and flexibility. They will encourage more people to invest in their own future and, in doing so, invest in the future of the nation. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The White Paper undoubtedly deals with important and, self-evidently, complex issues. No one in the House will deny the need for urgent reform. It was, after all, public anxiety in the aftermath of the Maxwell tragedy which, rightly, demanded a tougher regulatory structure, especially for occupational pensions. Can the Minister confirm, subject to the inevitable caveats about the legislative programme, that he intends to introduce the necessary legislation later this year?

Will the right hon. Gentleman perhaps say a word or two of explanation about why implementation has to wait until the spring of 1997? Is it not possible to introduce at least some of the essential safeguards in 1996? There is a need to reassure the public who want to know that they can make provision for their retirement with confidence.

The Government claim to have taken the essence of the Goode report and, to use the White Paper's phrase, to have "distilled" it. It might be better to say that they have boiled it down. Does the Minister recognise that there will be concern, as Professor Goode and his colleagues saw their recommendations as a package? We have, to some extent, something that is akin to pick and mix—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] The White Paper is full of generalisations designed to reassure, but it lacks specification. To take just one example, what are the strictly defined circumstances in which employers may withdraw a surplus from an occupational pension scheme? What new safeguards will there be to improve what is generally seen as an unsatisfactory position, particularly as trustees will no longer have to consult the regulator, as Goode recommended? Can the Minister understand our reservations when good practice is preferred as a principle to prescriptive legislation? Does he recall that Goode's aim was to put best practice into legislative form? That has simply not happened.

I welcome the decision that, in salary-related schemes, active members will be able to appoint a minimum of one third of trustees. But, given Goode's wish to build in best practice, should there not be a further debate about the right balance and whether the proposal represents a shift in control, implicit in the acceptance of pensions as a form of deferred pay? Can the Minister explain why the Goode recommendation that active members should appoint two thirds of trustees in money purchase schemes has been abandoned, given that the members bear the risk?

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

I welcome the provisions for time off with pay for the training of trustees. I recognise that a range of sensible suggestions from the Goode report have been accepted and I, too, congratulate the members of that committee on their work.

However, I express reservations about the White Paper's approach to the role of the regulator. In a recent speech, the Secretary of State made it clear that while the regulator will survive, his role will be much diminished; the office will be there, but not the powers that the Goode committee wanted. Why should the regulator not be directly involved in policing the minimum solvency requirement? Is it not a mistake to abandon the proposal that the regulator be funded by the Government? Does it buttress the independence of the post to leave the regulator dependent on a levy of the industry?

Is it not a comment on the way in which the regulator's powers have been emasculated that the Secretary of State can relegate the post, in a dismissive sporting metaphor from the White Paper, to the role of long stop? To swap metaphors, is not the regulator engaged in fire fighting, not fire prevention? He can act, in the Secretary of State's words,

"at the first sign of trouble."

But he is not being invited to try to prevent trouble before it happens—that seems to be a key distinction.

Will the Minister note our firm view that a strong minimum solvency requirement is an essential safeguard to the pension promise? We will want to look carefully at the departure from the Goode formula. I recognise that the decision was, to some extent, based on the advice of professional organisations representing actuaries, but that is not necessarily the last word on the matter. The White Paper talks of "exceptional action" if the solvency requirement, the 90 per cent. mark, is breached, but it is remarkably vague on what that means.

As the new formula is clearly weaker than that currently in place in many schemes—the Secretary of State mentioned that in his statement—is there not a danger that the minimum will become the norm and standards may fall? Does the Minister share our concern that the new definition based on cash equivalents will mean, particularly for many younger people, significant reductions in transfer values?

Does the Minister accept that the timid paragraph dealing with pension rights and divorce is a disappointment? It is extraordinary that research into the extent of the problem is apparently only now being instigated. I may have got the wrong impression, but I thought that the Lord Chancellor's Department had been beavering away for some years on the problem. What has happened to the Pensions Management Institute report, which was published after the institute had studied the subject with great care? When does the Secretary of State expect a report to emerge from his research which will allow the issue to be further considered, with early action to follow? Difficulties and disputes over pension policies will become more and more difficult and common in the years ahead.

We all appreciate the need to simplify and to encourage equal treatment for men and women, but does the Secretary of State appreciate that we will want to look carefully at the implications of breaking the link between contracted-out, salary-related schemes and SERPS, and at the adequacy of the overall quality test that is to be introduced? It is, after all, only a few years since requisite benefits were abandoned as a test of adequacy by the immediately retiring chairman of the Tory party, then in another office. Now it appears that they are reappearing in our midst.

We are also concerned about the ending of the guaranteed minimum pension—the GMP—which has been a safeguard of some significance. Without it, for example, Maxwell pensioners would have been in an even weaker position when the crash came. Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the arrival of the compensation scheme, which I whole-heartedly welcome, can fill the gap left by the abolition of the GMP only in cases of fraud or misappropriation? If those factors are not present, pensioners will be left without that safeguard.

We also want to be sure that there is not a hidden agenda and that the Government's uncritical commitment to encouraging personal pensions does not mean that SERPS and the state's role in pension provision will again be under attack. The deregulation working party recommended the ending of SERPS. Can the right hon. Gentleman rule that out and confirm that there are no further plans to weaken or undermine it?

I strongly welcome the long-delayed implementation of indexing of up to 5 per cent. for rights accrued after 1997, although here again the small print will be important. Does the Minister recognise that for some, particularly those for whom a fully indexed GMP was an important element of their pension provision, this will be bad news? It may also be bad news for all, if inflation rises again above 5 per cent. I do not imagine that the Secretary of State will give a guarantee that it never will.

The move towards age-related rebates for personal pensions and contracted-out money purchase schemes may be inevitable, but the White Paper once again prompts many questions. Perhaps the Minister can help us here. Does it mean, as I assume it does, the end of the 1 per cent. incentive for those over 30, which is estimated to cost about £165 million a year? Have the Government any intention of increasing the contracting-out payments above the current 4.8 per cent?

We are told in the White Paper that changes in contracting out from 1997 will reduce Government revenue by £1 billion a year. Does the Minister intend to recoup that loss, or will it be met by a straight Treasury subvention to the national insurance fund? Does the £1 billion in lost revenue include any provision for a greater weighting of the arithmetic in favour of personal pensions?

The discussion paper sets out three options for operating aged-related rebates. Typically, the White Paper merely offers further details in due course. Why the long wait, when the decision was anticipated in March 1992, announced in April 1993 and the consultation exercise has been completed? Will the Minister say a word or two about the timetable?

The White Paper has a grand title and is full of buzz words: "security", "equality", "choice". The Labour party believes in choice and we recognise the contribution of private pensions, especially occupational pensions. Our concern must be about the fact that the Government are committed to weighting the system towards their favoured options—in the private sector. The mis-selling of pensions, the scandal of the many thousands tempted to abandon occupational schemes, the 2 million-plus people persuaded to leave SERPS against their better interests—all these underline the need for tougher and effective regulation.

If the Secretary of State is not prepared to act on these problems—he has signally failed to do so in the White Paper, in which there is only a brief reference to the Securities and Investments Board inquiry—confidence will continue to be a scarce commodity and much sadness for pensioners will lie ahead.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his welcome for many components of this package of measures and I will endeavour to respond to his questions, which were detailed and lengthy. I do not complain about that, as they are very important questions, but if I see that you, Madam Speaker, are hesitant about the length of my replies, I will certainly respond later more fully to the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

The hon. Member asked whether I could confirm that there will be a Bill this year. Under the conventions, which mean that I cannot pre-empt what may be in the Queen's Speech, I certainly hope that a Bill will be introduced at the earliest possible opportunity. He asked why the changes will not, by and large, come into force until April 1997. That is because the Bill will not be completed until well into 1995. There will then need to be secondary legislation, once the primary powers exist in law, to deal with the detail. It is normal to give employers 12 months' notice of changes whenever we possibly can, so April 1997 is the optimum starting date.

In the meantime, I am certain that the whole industry remains aware and concerned in the wake of the Maxwell affair and is on its guard against fraud. We are trying to establish a system that will last in the longer term, when the immediate memory of the Maxwell affair has faded.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we have indulged in a pick and mix of the Goode committee report. That simply is not the case. We have accepted every major proposal and most of the minor proposals that Professor Goode and his colleagues put forward in that excellent report. I listened for any suggestions of other measures that the Labour party wishes to undertake, which were not in the package that I announced, and I listened in vain. The proposal is to lay down in law a tightening up of what are, essentially, the existing criteria for surpluses to make them clear and rigorous, and to make it obvious that this cannot be abused.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we did not go further than a third of trustees being appointed by members. That was the broad recommendation of the Goode committee and, obviously, individual schemes will be able to go further. If they want some different system of representation of their members—some have successful schemes involving pension committees, their various subsidiaries, and so on—they would have to get that agreed by the members as a whole before the new scheme was introduced. Obviously, if people made their objections known to the regulator about a particular scheme, he could repudiate it.

We did not go for two thirds of member trustees in the case of contracted-out money purchase schemes, partly for reasons of simplicity, partly because of the complexity that that would cause to hybrid schemes, which were part one and part the other, and partly because we did not want to convey the impression that trustees, when appointed, are purely representatives of an interest. They may be appointed by the members, but once they act as trustees, they have to act on behalf of the whole fund.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the role of the regulator was much diminished below that recommended by the pension law review committee. That is not so. It will have all the powers in full, which were, in essence, recommended by the Goode committee. What the regulator will not be is encumbered by certain bureaucratic procedures, which could have flowed from some of the recommendations of the PLRC and he will, therefore, be more effective by being better focused on areas of concern, rather than spending all the time responding to forms coming in from 150,000 different pension schemes, the vast majority of which are well managed. It is right that that role should be funded by the industry, rather than by the general taxpayer, because the benefit of a well-regulated system is a benefit that accrues to members of pension schemes themselves.

I was grateful for the strong support that the hon. Gentleman offered for a minimum solvency requirement. I agree that it is essential and it is hard to see how we could operate a proper scheme of regulation without that basic measure, which means that assets necessary to meet the liabilities are available. He suggested that we should have reverted to the original formula suggested by the pension law review committee. I know that that would not be welcomed by the industry, which will look askance at the suggestion from the Opposition Benches that we should return to that. We consulted widely on that issue and the suggestion put forward by the Institute and the Faculty of Actuaries gained considerable support and I believe that it is the right way to proceed.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to confirm that there will be substantial reductions in transfer values as a result of the changes. That is not the case. He asked why we are not immediately proceeding with action on the proposal by the Pensions Management Institute on divorce. The pension law review committee suggested that it was a very complex issue, which needed looking into further.

We have already commissioned research, which is under way. It involves interviewing some 4,500 people and will be completed in October 1995. We hope that that will give us a clearer gauge of the size of the problems that result from the inability of the courts in England, but not in Scotland, to split the pension rights between a divorcing couple. It is far from certain that the problem is as large or the solution is as simple as some have suggested.

The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the compensation scheme will provide compensation in respect of fraud and theft of assets, but not in respect of failure to provide the assets. The minimum solvency requirement ensures that companies provide the assets and that they are available to meet the liabilities.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for indexation. No doubt the extension of indexation of pensions in payment to the whole of pensions and not just the guaranteed minimum pension will be widely welcomed. As he said, if inflation exceeds the cap that will not be good, and pensioners will no doubt take that into account at election time, when they consider the records of different parties. Everyone knows that the Labour party is the friend of inflation, and any friend of inflation is no friend of the pensioner.

With the introduction of age-related rebates, we will no longer have need for the specific 1 per cent. premium that was introduced as a temporary measure the April before last.

The hon. Gentleman ended his remarks by giving us the welcome and somewhat surprising news that the Labour

[Mr. Lilley]

party believes in choice and supports occupational and personal pensions. For many of us, it was the first time that we had heard that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. That initial exchange has taken longer than 30 minutes. We shall return to the issue again and I now insist on brisk, direct questions. I am sure that the Minister will oblige with brisk answers.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on implementing all the Goode committee's major proposals. Will he confirm that that will provide a major boost of confidence to occupational pensions? Does he agree that all those who predicted that he would severely water down the Goode proposals must now be feeling very foolish?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. She is right to say that the package of measures that I have announced will be widely welcomed by all those with an interest in the pensions sector, especially the 20 million people who have an interest as present or future pensioners of occupational schemes. I cannot account for the speculation beforehand, but I am certain that those who indulged in it will have to revise their opinions, because we have provided a strong and powerful response to the Goode committee report.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am certainly prepared to give the White Paper our cautious welcome. It enshrines all the Goode recommendations and will provide a much more secure system of pension provision in a balanced way that will not prejudice the providers of pensions. That is very welcome.

Is there anything in the White Paper that will bring any sort of comfort to the victims of the Maxwell schemes? I want also to ask the right hon. Gentleman about unisex annuity rates. It is important, in terms of money purchase, that women receive equal treatment. What provisions are there in the White Paper to enable women to get guaranteed pensions for equal contributions?

Mr. Lilley: I am cautiously grateful for the hon. Gentleman's cautious welcome. There will be no retrospection in the measures introduced, so they cannot apply to the Maxwell pensioners. We have taken steps, including the establishment of the Maxwell pension unit and others of which the House is well aware, to ensure that all pensions are in payment for the pensioners of the Maxwell schemes. Progress is being made towards recouping the assets. We fully support the attempts to achieve a global settlement and all attempts to recover the assets. I believe and hope that that will result in pension liabilities being fully met by those schemes. As I said, there is nothing in the White Paper to deal with unisex annuity rates.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Can my right hon. Friend tell the House whether his imaginative announcement on the deferred annuity aspect of personal pensions, which will revolutionise the personal pension market, will apply to existing personal pension contracts? Does he agree that it is yet another example of the Government introducing every sensible measure for the personal pensions industry—unlike the Labour party?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, I can confirm that when the regulations are introduced in 1997, they will apply to existing personal pensions. That considerable change will mean that individuals will no longer find themselves forced to take out an annuity at a moment when they may not need to do so, and when the terms may not be appropriate for them.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank the Goode committee, through the Secretary of State, for all the work that led to today's White Paper. Will it embarrass the Secretary of State if I draw attention to his considerable public relations success over the past few weeks, in informing the media that he had lost most of the battles to establish the Goode recommendations in the White Paper? That allowed him to stand up today and claim such a success.

Is not the danger in so destabilising the media that they may miss the central weakness of the statement that the right hon. Gentleman just made? He failed to establish an independent regulator. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that this country's financial services sector is at such a low ebb among voters that most people believe that they would get a better deal buying a second-hand car from the Government than entrusting their pensions to a regulator who is not independent of the industry?

Mr. Lilley: I will certainly transmit the hon. Gentleman's thanks, which I am sure are echoed throughout the House, to the committee. I thank in turn the Select Committee for its valuable report, of which we were able to take account in framing the proposals.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to suppose that I set about a project of news management. I have no idea why speculation took the path that it did. It must now be acknowledged that we have, among other things, established an independent regulator. The proposed regulator will be independent. He will be funded by a levy on schemes, which will in no way prejudice his independence—any more than if the levy were imposed on taxpayers. It is more appropriate that it should be imposed on schemes because they will enjoy the benefits. There will be no discretion, and no one will be able to opt not to pay or to impose conditions in paying. I hope that that canard will not spread.

When the hon. Gentleman sees the legislation that comes before the House in due course, he will acknowledge that the regulator will be both independent and powerful.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): What action does my right hon. Friend propose in the White Paper to ensure that companies—many of which are well run—cannot take money from their pension funds, to make their end-of-year results and profits look good?

Mr. Lilley: They will be inhibited from doing so by the minimum solvency requirement, whereby they will be regularly checked to make sure that they have the assets, and by the rules against taking out surpluses, in the event that there are surpluses. The trustees will have a duty to ensure that the funds are there and that companies abide by the rules. The trustees will have the right to go to the regulator if they believe that any wrongful use is being made of a scheme's assets.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the issue of auditors or actuaries reporting to trustees and not to the employer, how will the "duty to whistleblow" to the regulator be

enforced? What protection will whistleblowers have? I can tell the Secretary of State frankly that a whistleblowing auditor would not have remained the late Bob Maxwell's auditor for many moons.

Mr. Lilley: There are precedents in legislation governing the rights and duties of auditors and other professionals to whistleblow. I seem to recall from my Treasury days that we introduced such an obligation in bank law in the wake of the Johnson Matthey debacle. That has worked quite well.

Concern had been expressed because professionals felt a professional obligation to those who employed them, which meant that they were professionally inhibited from going to the authorities, even if they saw something that filled them with concern and unease. Secondly, they might have felt that they stood to be subject to some legal disadvantage if they expressed their concerns. They will now have a clear statement of a duty and, as a result, they will run no legal risk if they go to the regulator in good faith and give information gained in confidence as a result of their professional duties. That will be a powerful defence—exactly as it might have been, as the hon. Member said, in the circumstances to which he referred.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): This is one of the best bits of news that pensions and occupational pensioners have had for many a year. It is an excellent statement. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be increased provision of information for pensioners and that a compensation scheme will be introduced for the first time? Will he also confirm that trustees will be subject to better selection and training as a result?

In relation to whistleblowers, my right hon. Friend should consider that a number of directors and bankers connected with the Maxwell empire, who were in possession of information, were not technically professional advisers. We should consider enforcing and tightening the whistleblowing provisions in relation to such people.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. He has been a powerful advocate of pensioners' interests, in the Select Committee and in the House. I can confirm that the measures will introduce for the first time a compensation mechanism in the event of fraud taking place. Trustees will be subject to better training because they will be able to take paid time off to be trained, which will enhance the position of funds generally. We will consider in the secondary legislation how widely the whistleblowing provisions should extend.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Personal pensions can be an appropriate choice for some individuals, but for about 2 million people who have opted out of SERPS into personal pensions their contributions are far too low to guarantee them a rate of return as good as it would have been in SERPS. The inquiry into that and about how those people should be compensated—if they are to be compensated at all—is still continuing.

Would it not have been more sensible for the Secretary of State not to make any more commitments about the extension of opting out until the position of individuals who had opted out had been resolved? It would have been better if people who were mis-sold policies by opting out of SERPS knew that they were to be compensated. Such compensation should apply to anyone who makes a similar mistake in the older age group in the future.

Mr. Lilley: I remind the hon. Member that the Securities and Investments Board is considering this matter and so far it has received no evidence of wrongful mis-selling to persuade people to opt out of SERPS into private pensions. It is looking to establish the extent of any possible problem. If it establishes that one exists, it will ensure that a remedy is available for those who were mis-sold pensions. There is no reason for concern by those people. There is, therefore, no reason for us to delay taking action that will ensure security in the different area of occupational pensions. There is not the slightest case for delay.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the flexibility in taking annuities will be one of the most beneficial of all the proposals put forward? It will remove the burden that is artificially placed on people who want to take their pension, when they are asked to pick and choose on one day the annuity rate that will last for the rest of their lives. Is there any proposed limit on the amount of money that can be taken in that way from schemes in the future?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right that the greater flexibility offered will be welcomed. It will be possible to take out the tax-free lump sum and, on top of that, annual income—treating it as if it were an annuity—before the final conversion of the remaining sum into an annuity, if people wish to do so. The Inland Revenue will lay down the limits on the maximum amount that can be taken out in that form of income each year.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but we will have to look at the details of the White Paper. Why did he not make it an obligation on pension funds to provide an annual statement by right rather than having to have it requested? That would have provided even greater protection to pensions funds.

Mr. Lilley: It was decided that every member should have the right to the information, but it would not necessarily be an obligation to send all the information to every member each year. I do not think that everybody reads all the bumph that comes through their doors, but they should have the right to the information if they are interested in it. It should be clear and relevant information and that is what the regulations will ensure. We did not want to impose the unnecessary burden of the cost of disseminating information, much of which would go straight into the wastepaper basket.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I congratulate my right hon. Friend, particularly on abolishing the complicated guaranteed minimum pension which will make it a lot easier for employers to administer occupational pension schemes. Is not the overall test of quality a much better way of protecting the interests of scheme members?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend has recognised an important aspect of the proposals. The abolition of guaranteed minimum pensions will benefit the industry and make it simpler in future to handle the opting out of people from SERPS. It will be simpler to operate a quality check that ensures that the pension rights that people acquire when they leave SERPS are better than they would have had, had they remained in SERPS, without the burdensome and cumbersome calculations involved in the GMPs.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that it is nothing short of an outrage that, after all the fine words we have heard over the past half an hour or more, the Maxwell pensioners will not be a penny piece better off? Also, other victims such as the miners who have had £800 million stolen from their pension fund by the National Coal Board and British Coal successively will not have any money distributed to them.

What do we expect from a Government who have just told the railway workers that they will pinch half of their pension funds as a result of privatisation and steal half the miners' funds as a result of coal privatisation? We should have known better than to think that we would get anything.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what, by his standards, constitutes warm support for my statement, although he had some objections to things that I did not include in it.

Mr. Skinner: The Secretary of State has done nothing.

Mr. Lilley: Considerable progress has been made as a result of changes that we have made. Some £84 million of assets have already been returned to the fund this year and progress is being made in securing funds that the trustees have said they hope will enable all the liabilities of the schemes to be met in due course. We must all hope that progress continues to that end.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): As my right hon. Friend knows, I have several hundred Maxwell pensioners in my constituency. May I say how much I welcome the White Paper, particularly the compensation scheme? However, as my right hon. Friend knows, the dividing line between fraud and mismanagement of funds is sometimes finely drawn. How are the terms and conditions of the compensation fund to be drawn and will it provide any cover for maladministration?

Mr. Lilley: We are establishing a compensation board which will handle this, and it will decide in particular cases whether there has been fraud or abuse. It will be up to the board to analyse the circumstances. It is right that that should be the approach rather than trying to specify to the umpteenth detail in legislation.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does not the Secretary of State agree that the only people who will benefit from the changes in the annuity rules are those who can postpone their pensions for 10 or 15 years—the very rich? The real problem with the annuity rules is that the value of a pension taken out in 1990 is a quarter less than a pension taken today. The annuity rule proves that personal pension schemes are a gamble. The amounts paid out depend on interest rates, the price of gilts and other things that will take place in 20, 30 or 40 years.

Is not the Secretary of State simply exposing millions more people to overselling and to exploitation by the personal pensions industry? He has today loaded more people into a lifeboat that is already sinking.

Mr. Lilley: That is a bit of a change of heart from the hon. Gentleman who, in an Adjournment debate, called for more flexibility. Why did he want us to entice people into this sinking lifeboat then but not now? I believe that everyone else will think that he was right the first time and wrong the second.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my right hon. Friend commend the foresight and hard work put into the preparation of the pensions document by the Government's youngest Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)? Will he admit that he has accepted not only the main recommendations of the Goode committee but those of the Social Security Select Committee and that the regime introduced in the White Paper is strict and simple and will not run the risk of deterring employers from wanting to start an occupational pension fund?

Mr. Lilley: I can certainly confirm that a great deal —indeed, the vast bulk—of the credit for the effort that has gone into preparing the statement and the White Paper lies with my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for pensions, who has done much of the work.

I can also confirm what my hon. Friend says about the effectiveness of the arrangements that my colleague has ensured will be put in place. They will be simple and effective and will incorporate the main recommendations of the pension law review committee.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I do not welcome the statement at all. Is not it simply another bonanza for con merchants? What is wrong with expanding a good Government scheme which has some stability and security, instead of siphoning off more money in commission, profit and the proliferation of administration in which these arrangements will result—or am I the one old-fashioned sentimentalist left?

Mr. Lilley: I shall not comment on the hon. Gentleman's self-description. Of course, far from providing a field day for con merchants, these arrangements are designed to prevent fraud and abuse. I believe that they will be effective in doing so and, as such, they will be welcomed by the 20 million people who have interests in pension schemes and who can now rest assured that those schemes will be properly regulated and protected.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): In the light of the difficulties with the Coloroll pension scheme experienced by many of my constituents, is my right hon. Friend aware of how welcome these proposals will be, especially those relating to the minimum solvency requirements? Given that many of my constituents delayed transfer values on their pensions when they wished to transfer out of the Coloroll scheme, will he do all that he possibly can to ensure that the European Court makes a judgment soon, as we have already been waiting more than a year?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, I think that the experience of my hon. Friend's constituents bears out the importance of the changes that we are introducing. I certainly hope that the long-awaited judgment on Coloroll comes soon, although I am not sure that I can bring pressure to bear on the court. As my hon. Friend says, we have been waiting more than a year.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the regulator have the powers retrospectively to disqualify trustees for past misdemeanours? I have in mind Messrs Michael Spiers and Kenneth Shaw who made themselves sole trustees of Teampace Holdings pension fund and then committed clear breaches of trust—if not fraud—which

have deprived many of my constituents who paid into Burmans pension fund, which was subsequently taken over by Teampace Holdings, of their full pensions?

Mr. Lilley: I cannot comment on that specific case, although if, by one means or another, the hon. Lady can give me more information, I will, naturally, study it. There cannot be retrospective disqualification, but disqualification arrangements can take into account whether someone is a fit and proper person to be a trustee in future. That will be a feature of the new regime.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Does the Secretary of State accept that any lack of public confidence in the Government's commitment to carry through some of the recommendations of the Goode report is coloured by their failure to do anything about outstanding cases?

The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones)is not unknown to the Government. The Department of Trade and Industry has had a full dossier on that case for some considerable time and there is still no sign that anything is being done about it. Is it not time the Government cleared up the issues that they know about and that need action, rather than just making promises for the future that few of us are confident they will carry through?

Mr. Lilley: I understand that there is to be an Adjournment debate next week to which my hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry will respond. I am sure that their response will be satisfactory to the hon. Members who are raising it.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): Will the Secretary of State clarify his comments to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), on the workings of the compensation board in circumstances such as those facing my constituents who used to work for Burlingtons at Atherstone and whose pension fund had become depleted as a result of the behaviour of those running it, which perhaps fell short of fraud, but represented serious mismanagement? There was insufficient evidence to prosecute, but questionable activities were certainly taking place.

Mr. Lilley: I should make it clear that the compensation arrangements that we are proposing will not be retrospective. They will not apply to fraudulent activities or thefts in the past. We shall try to learn from the experience of the past in framing the legislation to make sure that it catches the cases we want to catch.

Business of the House

4.26 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 27 JUNE—Until seven o'clock, debate on "The Role of Select Committees" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Followed by motion on the Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order.

TUESDAY 28 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Coal Industry Bill.

Motions on the Ports (Northern Ireland) Order and the Ports (Northern Ireland Consequential Provisions) Order.

WEDNESDAY 29 JUNE—Opposition Day (15th allotted day).

There will be a debate entitled "Failure of the Government's Housing and Urban Policy" on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 30 JUNE—Motion on the Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order.

Motion on the Civil Service (Management Functions) (Northern Ireland) Order.

Motion on the Welfare of Livestock Regulations.

Debate on information technology and data and video services for Members, on the basis of reports from the Information Committee and the Broadcasting Committee. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 1 JULY—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 4 JULY—Opposition Day (16th Allotted Day).

There will be a debate on "The Child Support Agency" on an Opposition motion.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 29 June to consider European Community document No. 5074/94 relating to energy and economic and social cohesion.

[Monday 27 June

Debate on the role of Select Committees

Documents:

Second Report from the Select Committee on Procedure Session 1989-90 on the Working of the Select Committee System.

The Working of the Select Committee System—Government's response to the second report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Procedure session 1989-90. CM 1532

Wednesday 29 June

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 5074/94, Energy and Economic and Social Cohesion; Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: HC 48-xv (1992-93) and HC 48-xxi (1992-93).

Thursday 30 June

Information Committee—First Report of Session 1993-94, HC 237; The Provision of a Parliamentary Data and Video Network. First Report of Session 1992-93, HC 737; The Provision of Members' Information Technology Equipment, Software and Services.

Broadcasting Committee—First Report of Session 1991-92, HC 323; The Provision in Members' Offices of Access to Clean Televsion Feed.]

[Mr. Tony Newton]

I regret that I am still not in a position to give the House the date that is perhaps uppermost in hon. Members' minds. I can, however, give them another useful date for their diaries: my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposes to introduce his Budget statement on Tuesday 29 November. I hope that that date is a little further ahead than the summer recess.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I know that we have been asking for statements and business to be scheduled a little ahead of the usual announcements, but the Leader of the House has excelled himself on this occasion, and I thank him for it. I also thank him for his statement and for the two Opposition days.

The Chancellor will be publishing the second of the two Industry Act forecasts next Tuesday—slightly nearer to the present day than November—yet we still do not know whether a statement in the House will accompany the publication of that forecast. It is very much our view that there should be a statement. An historical precedent exists—there always has been a statement—and I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to say that there will be one on this occasion. In any event, can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that there will be a day's debate in Government time on the second of the two Industry Act forecasts before the summer recess?

Can the right hon. Gentleman also confirm—I accept he cannot announce it before next week—that there will at some stage be a debate on the individual departmental public spending plans? That is important in any case—it is an annual event which the House has a right to expect—but, given the discussions now going on in the Government, it is surely all the more important.

I accept that the Leader of the House cannot tell us the date of the recess today. But a request to know the date of the recess is not a request for an early recess; it is simply a request to know the date. So I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to tell us soon when the House is to rise and when we are expected to come back in the autumn.

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I have said, but I note the request, and also the continuing tension between the number of demands for debates of various kinds and the hopes in some parts of the House—even if those are not shared by the hon. Gentleman—for a reasonably early start to the recess.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific points about statements, debates and the like, I cannot say anything further about departmental reports, but I can tell him that I expect the summer economic forecast to be available to hon. Members from the Vote Office at 11 am on Tuesday 28 June. I do not anticipate a need or a justification for an oral statement, because the present arrangements are not on all fours with the situation in the old days of the autumn statement. However, the summer economic forecast can be discussed during the summer economic debate that I certainly expect us to have before the recess.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, amid the otherwise admirable arrangements that now govern the national health service, the continuance of the Whitley system works strongly against the notional freedom of trusts to set their own wages? Can he assure us that he will allow us an opportunity to debate that important matter before the recess?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot undertake to provide an opportunity for a debate on that precise matter, but I can bring my hon. Friend's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Treasury is requiring the Department of Transport to make efficiency savings of up to 20 per cent. across the Department, and that an important part of the Department's work covers the Coastguard Agency? Is he aware that in coastal communities throughout the United Kingdom there is great concern that if a 20 per cent. cut were made in the Coastguard Agency, safety at sea could be prejudiced? Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for an opportunity to raise the matter on the Floor of the House before the summer?

Mr. Newton: Once again, I cannot respond specifically to the request for what I would call a dedicated debate on that matter, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will give great weight to considerations of safety. He will certainly want to consider the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May I tell the Lord President of the Council that I have just received from the Ministry of Defence a written reply telling me that the royal yacht Britannia is to be decommissioned in 1997? That is horrendous news for my constituents and myself—and, I am sure, for many other people throughout the country. Britain without Britannia is like the Tower of London without the crown jewels. May we have an urgent debate on the subject? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Newton: I sense that there is some support for my hon. Friend. As it happens, I was aware of that answer. Indeed, I have it here, and in the light of what my hon. Friend has said perhaps I should put on the record for the House the latter part:

"In view of the success of Britannia in her representational role during state visits, and on other state occasions, and of the part played by the royal yacht in trade promotion, the Government believe it right to consider, without commitment, whether there should be a replacement at some future point, together with other options for meeting the tasks presently fulfilled by Britannia."

That puts the matter into some perspective.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that a statement has long been expected and awaited on the Government's policy in regard to the renewal of the BBC's charter. Shall we be receiving the statement next week, or at least before the summer recess?

Mr. Newton: I do not at present expect a statement to be made next week, but of course my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement at the earliest possible moment when it is practicable to do so.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): May I say to my right hon. Friend how disappointed I was about the business that he announced for next Wednesday? It is appalling that, on a day when we are yet again to have an industrial dispute on the railways, he has arranged for an Opposition day. May we have a debate in Government

time on industrial relations? At least then, the Opposition, if they wish to participate—and in particular the three candidates for the Labour party leadership—could confirm whether they support the view of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), the junior Labour spokesman on transport, who has made it clear that he believes that strike action is acceptable.

Mr. Newton: What a very good question! During his Trappist period, my hon. Friend's talents and remarks were —I had better not say "wasted" so let me say "much missed"; I particularly welcome his comments on this matter. I cannot undertake immediately to change the business in the way that he suggested, much as I should like to do so. I must observe, however, that, were we to schedule such a debate and to seek a clear expression of views from the Opposition, we might end up with six hours' silence.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): May I remind the Leader of the House of the exchange about child care provision in the Palace of Westminster that took place on Monday during questions to the House of Commons Commission? May I refer him to early-day motion 1350?

[That this House believes that in-house childcare provision combined with the provision of childcare vouchers would enhance the opportunities as well as the productivity of parents who work at the Palace of Westminster.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that time will be provided for a debate on that important issue on the Floor of the House before the summer recess?

Mr. Newton: There are a number of matters affecting the House on which I hope to arrange debates before the summer recess, one of which—proposals for the parliamentary data and video network—I announced this afternoon. I cannot, however, undertake to arrange a debate on the issue raised by the hon. Lady or add to what was said on Monday by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who speaks for the House of Commons Commission.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 1369 standing in my name?

[That this House endorses the proposals of the Association of British Counties to reinstate the ancient and historic counties to the maps of England and Wales for all purposes other than local government except where the county is small enough to be constituted as a one-tier authority and for the ancient counties to be confirmed in all cases as the units for heritage, postal, cultural, sporting and boundary signage purposes; and urges the Department of the Environment not to confirm any proposals for one-tier administrative authorities which cross the boundaries of the historic counties.]

The motion asks for the restoration of ancient and historic British counties for all purposes other than local government. Bearing in mind the great anger that was felt in the 1970s when many of those counties were abolished in an act that was almost Stalinist in its abolition of history and heritage, would not it be more acceptable if, under the new local government reviews, those counties were restored for all purposes other than local government? Would not a debate be topical in the light of recent controversies involving Wales, Huntingdonshire and Rutland?

Mr. Newton: That was another very ingenious and interesting question. The House may not be short of opportunities to debate such matters in the foreseeable future. I cannot respond precisely to my hon. Friend's ingenious request, but it may be of some encouragement to him, if I get the drift of his question, that the long-standing abolition of Middlesex as an administrative entity has not prevented it from continuing to have a cricket team.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the direct Government intervention in the current industrial dispute taking place every Wednesday, is the Leader of the House aware that a statement from the Government would be welcome? Is not it clear that, far from blaming the Opposition, the vast majority of passengers know and understand that it is the Government who are at fault and who have made it clear that they would interfere if the agreement were not to their liking? As a letter in *The Daily Telegraph* makes clear, people appreciate the responsibility of those engaged in the dispute, the work that they carry out and their desire for a living wage.

Mr. Newton: At least that came closer to some sort of statement than anything that we have managed to extract from the Labour party leadership contenders. I construe the hon. Gentleman's remarks as an expression of support for the strike. I hope that my interpretation is correct, in which case he had better try to explain to the British public how he thinks it is justified to strike on an 11 per cent., no-strings-attached increase in basic pay in the present circumstances.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on the commuter railway, because that would give me a chance to express the anger of thousands of my commuting constituents who yesterday had no train service on the north Kent line or any other line through Gravesham—at a time when they are having to pay an extra 6 per cent. in fares out of increases in pay that are level with or below the rate of inflation—as a result of a bid by the railway unions for an 11 per cent. pay increase at those commuters' expense and without even any strings attached?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is precisely right. I am sure that the views that he expressed on behalf of his commuting constituents will be shared by my commuting constituents. Were the strikes to be successful, they could have only one of three consequences: to increase taxation, to increase borrowing or—and in some ways this is the most likely—further to increase fares.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Is the Leader of the House aware of the increasing anxiety about the future of the Post Office? Government statements have increased that anxiety rather than reducing it in relation to Crown Post Offices, the network of post offices, sorting offices and the Royal Mail. I draw his attention to early day motion 1326 on the Abbey Wood sorting office.

[That this House is opposed to the proposed closure of the Royal Mail Sorting Office at Abbey Wood and relocation in Thamesmead; notes that the present office is easily accessible to Abbey Wood residents and is served by both buses and British Rail, whereas the Thamesmead Sorting Office is only easily accessible to people with their own private transport and that it is not served by public transport and is located on a dual carriageway which has no footpath; believes that the relocation would cause great hardship, particularly to elderly and disabled people and parents with young children and that the proposal is motivated purely by financial reasons to increase Post Office profits at the expense of a service to the public; is concerned that if the sorting office closes, the Crown Post Office will soon follow; expresses support for the

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

Union of Communication Workers in its campaign to save these services; and calls for the immediate withdrawal of the closure proposals.]

May we have a debate before the recess on the Government's intentions for the Post Office?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware of the assurances that the Government have given on their approach to the network generally, and not least to the network of sub-post offices. He will know that the Government intend to produce a Green Paper, which I expect to be published before too long. That, no doubt, will answer some of his questions and provide him with an opportunity to express his views and those of others.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Will my right hon. Friend allow time for a wide-ranging debate on the need to maintain, if not extend, the Government's trade union legislation? Within a few days of the Labour party's doing well in the European elections, a major public sector union once again felt able—indeed, encouraged—to go on strike, showing that, beneath the veneer, nothing has changed in the Labour movement.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is precisely right. He and others will be entitled to continue to press until we have some clear statement from the Opposition on their view of what is widely regarded as irresponsible and damaging action.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): In the week in which the second public inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road begins, may we have an urgent ministerial statement on why the Government have chosen to suppress the report of the first and very expensive public inquiry into the relief road?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is no doubt familiar with the details of the history of the matter, which goes back over a long period to the time when I was the Minister responsible for inner cities at the end of the 1980s. I will bring his point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider arranging a debate on Iraq? Is he aware that, more than three years after the war ended, Iraq still holds 625 Kuwaiti prisoners of war, in firm defiance of United Nations resolutions? Is he aware that three Kuwaiti Members of Parliament are coming to Britain next week? It would be heartening for them to hear that this Parliament has not abandoned the Kuwaiti prisoners of war.

Mr. Newton: Again, while I cannot promise a debate, I acknowledge my hon. Friend's concern, which will be widely shared and which I will ensure, once again, is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on, or give us an opportunity to investigate, the recruitment methods and procedures used when appointing regulators to the public utilities? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the widespread concern about the Director General of Gas Supply, and a debate would allow us to shed some light on this recess of Government decision making.

Mr. Newton: I did, of course, see the fairly extensive publicity that attended the inquiries of the Trade and Industry Select Committee some weeks ago. In so far as it is appropriate to deal with some aspects of that publicity, it is appropriate to leave it to the Select Committee.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on grant-maintained schools, of which there are three excellent examples in my constituency, so that we can discuss the educational advantages that they achieve—advantages which are appreciated by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who sends a member of his family to a grant-maintained school in Fulham, some distance from his constituency and his London home?

Mr. Newton: I do not object to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) or anybody else taking advantage of the many excellent grant-maintained schools but on this, as on a number of other matters, we could do with some clearer explanation of the policies that he appears to espouse—in so far as one can judge what policies he espouses—which [illegible] seek to deny other people that right.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Professor Tim Brighouse is not only chief education officer of Birmingham but a deeply serious educationist. Do the Government realise that some of us were absolutely appalled and embarrassed when a senior Minister of the Crown let go such a gratuitous insult? Should not a serious statement be made next week on where the £50,000 will come from, because whereas normally most Members of Parliament would agree that Departments of State should meet compensation awards, this was a gratuitous insult? The principle is this: are taxpayers to pay for the gratuitous insults of Ministers?

Mr. Newton: I think that I said twice when answering at Prime Minister's questions that this is a private matter, but perhaps I could amplify that. At all stages, the matter has been dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education in a personal capacity. The Government have not been involved in the proceedings either financially or legally. Indeed, my right hon. Friend made that clear as long ago as 19 January in answer to a parliamentary question, when he said:

"This is being treated as a personal, not a Government matter."

—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 609.]

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend will be aware that at this weekend's meeting of the Council of Ministers in Corfu the Prime Minister and other heads of state will discuss the Delors report and the new draft Bangemann report on information technology and the super-highway and how it should create jobs. May we have an early debate on the subject, as that report and others call on the rest of Europe to follow the United Kingdom's example of fast tracking to get the market in information technology working well?

Mr. Newton: Again, perhaps in a more specific way, my hon. Friend echoes something that I said at Prime Minister's Question Time about the proceedings at Corfu. I cannot promise a debate, but I anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make a statement on his return, and reference to that matter might be in order and appropriate.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In Monday's debate on Select Committees, does the Leader of the House think that it would be helpful to reflect on the fact that in two recent debates—on the Trade Marks Bill and on pensions during an Opposition day—virtually every Conservative Member declared a financial interest in the subject under consideration? Although there is no suggestion that anyone acted improperly, would not it be better for the authority of Select Committee reports and the respect that they are given outside the House if hon. Members with a financial interest in the subject that the Select Committee is investigating were excluded from its membership?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a useful point to make, no doubt he will make it in Monday's debate. I would point out, in the immediate aftermath of a statement on non-state pensions, that, as an occupational pension scheme operates for all Members of Parliament, the hon. Gentleman's suggestion would prevent every hon. Member from speaking on the subject in the House.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on great political con tricks? Does he think that an appropriate subject for the debate would be the way in which Labour Members have denied that there was anything wrong in Monklands in the past 18 months? Is he aware that only this Tuesday the Labour candidate in Monklands confirmed that everything that I have been saying about corruption and wrong-doing in Monklands was absolutely true and correct?

Mr. Newton: I am a little uncertain whether the Labour candidate in Monklands would accept the interpretation that my hon. Friend has placed on her remarks. Nevertheless, she has acknowledged the need to make some inquiries, which is a significant vindication of the campaign—as I suppose it must be called—which my hon. Friend has waged on that matter.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Is not it time that we had a debate on the value for money that trade unions get through sponsoring Members of Parliament? This is the second week of a national dispute that has caused massive disruption to millions of people on the basis of an 11 per cent. inflation-busting pay claim by the RMT, but we have yet to hear a word from the 11 Labour Members and four senior members of the shadow Cabinet who are sponsored by the RMT.

Mr. Newton: We might get into a debate about the definition of what is regarded as value for money, so perhaps I should stay out of that.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the Leader of the House find time for an urgent debate on the state of democracy in Nigeria—or rather, the lack of democracy there? In the early hours of this morning, Chief Mashood Abiola, who is widely regarded as the duly elected President of that country, was arrested by the military regime, bundled into an aircraft and taken from Lagos to Abudja. Is not it high time that the House was given an opportunity to express its opinion and call for the return of civilian democratic rule in that country?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that the information immediately available to me is not quite as up to date as that reported by my hon. Friend. In the light of what he has said, however, his concern is understandable and I will bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a debate on railway safety and inquire into whether, during the present industrial dispute, members of British Rail management have been operating signal boxes without the right certificates of safety? Will he also note that I raised that point on another occasion?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will be aware that comments have been made on that matter to the effect that there is no reason to suppose that danger has been incurred by anybody for the reasons that she seeks to imply. Of course, I will bring the question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

MONOPOLIES AND MERGERS

That the draft Fair Trading Act (Amendment) (Merger Prenotification) Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

COMPETITION

That the Anti-Competitive Practices (Exclusions) (Amendment) Order 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 1557) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

UK Exporters

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

4.51 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): The House has had several debates on exports over the past few months, but, as I have been away trying to get business for the United Kingdom, I have unfortunately been unable to attend them. I welcome this opportunity to take part in such a debate because I believe that there is now an enormous chance to rebuild Britain's share of world trade.

The United Kingdom's present position is one both of hope and of opportunity because, in the past 15 years, two revolutionary changes have transformed the opportunities that now confront us. The first is the transformation in industrial relations. I am sure that the present dispute is purely a hiccup in Britain's advance from the appalling problems of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The number of working days lost due to labour disputes in 1993 was 600,000 compared with 29 million in 1979. Fewer days were lost during the whole of the past nine years than in the single year of 1979 alone. I am also glad to say that the message is getting through to the most important trade unions in the country.

I mentioned to the House yesterday a brochure produced by the Amalgamated Engineering Union called "The Dawn of a New Era: Improving Industrial Relations". One of the first statements that it contains is:

"The new age of industrial relations in Britain means a more common-sense approach to trade unionism is needed if companies are going to prosper."

That is a fundamental change from the 1970s, when management spent most of their time closeted with their shop stewards while union bosses spent most of their time, having lost total control of their membership, in No. 10 Downing street trying to run the country.

All that has changed. We are not returning to Victorian-style management, but are achieving a genuine wish by everyone in business and industry to work together for a common cause. The effects of that can be seen in our economy. Manufacturing industry invested a greater proportion of its output in the 1980s than in the 1970s. Profitability of manufacturing since 1980 has averaged 5.2 per cent., compared with 3.4 per cent. between 1974 and 1979. Growth in business investment in the 1980s was faster than in any other major industrialised country except Japan. Compared to 1979, investment in plant and machinery is nearly 50 per cent. higher. Over the last economic cycle, manufacturing investment increased by nearly a fifth and business investment by more than half. We have attracted the lion's share of inward investment into the EC—more than 40 per cent. from Japan and nearly 40 per cent. from the United States.

Even in the constituency of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), there have been six investment projects in 1993-94, involving a total plan investment of £15 million and some 500 jobs. With one or two notable exceptions, Labour Members say that there is a decline in manufacturing. That is nonsense. Since 1981, output has risen by a quarter, productivity by nearly three quarters and exports by three quarters.

So that is the first revolutionary change that has occurred. The second, which has been just as important, has been the privatisation of our public monopolies and basic industries—the water industry, British Telecom, British Gas, the electricity industry, the nuclear industry, British airports and British ports. None of those either exported or invested abroad before 1979. British Steel, British Leyland and British shipbuilding were all in terminal decline. They had appalling labour relations, poor quality and out-dated products, and were under-invested. Those companies are now becoming major contributors to Britain's export effort and invisible trade surplus.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Minister mentioned two profound changes in the landscape over the past 10 years. Will he add a third—the profound swathe of destruction over much of manufacturing industry, which happened just over 10 years ago as a result of the Government's exchange rate policy?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to what I said about manufacturing output, which has risen by 25 per cent., and about the success that Britain's manufacturing industry has had in increasing its productivity, efficiency and investment. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there was a decline in Britain's manufacturing in the early 1980s. The reason for that was that, in the 1960s and 1970s, Britain's management could not manage. It could not make profits, and managers spent their life in endless debate with shop stewards. The Government, particularly the Labour Government, had no control over the trade union movement, which did enormous damage to Britain's image and industrial infrastructure. Only when the Conservatives returned to power in 1979 did investment from overseas start to flow back into the country and British manufacturing companies start to re-invest here rather than go overseas.

Had the Labour party been in government since 1979, would trade union labour relations have been reformed? Would a Labour Government have reformed the labour relations system, as we have? I spent the first four years of my time in this House listening to Labour Members oppose every measure that the Government brought on to the Floor of the House.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Is not the Opposition's true interest in how well our industry is doing shown by the fact that, at the opening of this important debate, only two Labour Back-Bench Members are present?

Mr. Needham: I shall discuss my hon. Friend's argument later, because indifference towards exporting characterises the Labour party, with the honourable exception of the hon. Members for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), who are in the Chamber.

Does anyone suggest that, had the Labour party been in power, we would have had privatisation? Would we have made that enormous change, which has allowed our former public monopolies—now our private companies—to go overseas to trade and export? Are any Labour Members saying that they would have followed the privatisation route? If they are saying that now, they will have to answer the charge that they opposed every privatisation measure that we have ever brought before the House.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Is not one of the many fascinating side effects of the privatisation programme of public utilities the £2 billion worth of

contracts that the privatised water companies have brought back from Latin America—a result of what can be done by our utilities if they are freed from the dead hand of Government control?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend mentions one example; I shall mention more later. That is exactly the type of thing that would never have happened if the Labour party had been in power in that period. Britain would have been to the Europe of the 1980s what Spain was to the Europe of the 1780s if the Labour party had had anything to do with our affairs. To use a phrase of the mid-west of America, if the Labour party had been in power we would have been "hollowed out".

It is not enough to have achieved what we have. Now, we must seize the chance to devise and implement a strategic partnership with industry and business and to build on the opportunities that we have created for ourselves, and we are doing so. In the past two years, we have attracted into the Department of Trade and Industry from the private sector more than 90 export promoters. They are experts in the markets in which they have worked. They are the hinge on which the Government are building the partnership with business. With their help, we now have about 80 country market plans. We have considered the strengths, the weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats in the markets and what Britain can bring to those countries that we do not currently bring.

We have identified sectors in each of the countries. We have linked the sector opportunities to companies in this country. We are using the most senior people in British industry and British business—British management—to help to godfather our staff in the DTI and to work with the export promoters to ensure that every opportunity that presents itself in those countries is transmitted to the companies in the United Kingdom that could benefit. We have linked the holders of posts overseas—the commercial attachés, the ambassadors—into the market plans through the Joint Export Promotion Directorate so that we have a seamless, coherent policy in each major market of the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) mentioned South America. I shall take India as an example. In the past eight months, we have signed more than £2 billion worth of orders for infrastructure projects in India. Four export promoters are in place. We have identified 15 sectors of the Indian economy in which British companies can do more than they are currently doing.

We have increased export credit guarantee cover. We have ensured that that export credit guarantee cover is competitively priced with export credit agencies anywhere in the world. In fact, we are in danger of running out of the cover because we have used so much of it. We are talking not only about the big companies in infrastructure but the little companies—companies such as Mr. Brown, who has developed a system of new types of grass seeds which could revolutionise the growing of grass in India. He has even come up with a brand new form of begonia, which is taking the Indian market by storm. There are 200 million middle-class Indians, capable of spending their money and wanting to spend it on high-quality British products.

We have considered the city of Bangalore, one of the most exciting cities in India. Together, the Singaporeans and the British will make Bangalore one of the great cities of the next century. We are flying Concorde out in November with 100 British business men on board and we shall bring Concorde back with 100 Indian business men on board, to consider the opportunities for Indian companies to invest in the United Kingdom and to discover how we can help India to expand its economy by exporting through the United Kingdom and into Europe.

Our exports to India are now more than £1 billion, as are India's exports to us. Through the organisational structure and infrastructure that we have set out in the Indo-British partnership initiative, we have created opportunities in that country, which, after China, is the most exciting opportunity anywhere in Asia. That would not even have been thought of, let alone possible, two, three or five years ago. Throughout the world, whether it be with Japan, the United States, Korea, Malaysia or Thailand, we are working to establish closer, bilateral trading relationships, against the market strategy that I have just described.

We must get that message through to small and medium-sized British companies. I ask all Members in the Chamber, including Opposition Members, if they have companies in their constituencies that are good exporters but do not necessarily have the support and back-up to tackle every major market, to tell them about the DTI plans. If those companies are told about what the DTI is doing, we will ensure that we envelop them in the strategy that we are following so that those opportunities are brought direct to their doorstep.

I am delighted to say that when we decided to go to Members of the House of Commons to explain that, about 60 Conservative Back Benchers came along and showed interest and commitment. However, I am afraid that, although the hon. Member for Middlesbrough did his best to try to interest his colleagues, we only managed to find six of them. I hope that that message of indifference will be reported back.

We are setting up 200 Business Links offices to provide a single access point for companies throughout the country. Every one of those offices will have proper information databases about opportunities for exporting and will have available to it the full range of overseas trade services. The larger Business Links offices will have export support services attached. We shall appoint 70 export development counsellors to work in those areas, who will be able to help companies to begin exporting and to become involved with the other DTI opportunities.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the excellent practical content of his speech? It makes such a refreshing contrast to the vague, idealistic waffle that we have heard so often from the two socialist parties. I have no doubt that we shall hear more of it from them this afternoon.

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall discuss some of that vague waffle later.

We are developing closer relationships with the clearing banks, including a pilot service for referring potential exporters. We recently announced the language for export initiative. The need for it and the response of business have surpassed our wildest estimates. British business now knows what needs to be done in terms of competitiveness, management skills and the learning of languages and it is taking advantage.

We are also ensuring that the Departments in Whitehall that are responsible for the sectors of British business and British industry for which the DTI is not responsible, such

[Mr. Needham]

as agriculture, construction, health and education, have their own export strategies and export units, and that each of them has a Minister who is responsible for exports. We are co-ordinating between ourselves the missions that go abroad. We are ensuring that we support the exhibitions overseas that are most likely to deliver the targeted approach and that we bring out to the markets the companies that are most likely to benefit from participating in such exhibitions.

We are ensuring that people in the regions have an opportunity to understand what is happening in their regions through the celebration of industry years. We are designating 1995-96 a major celebration of industry year in the west midlands, which will proselytise and promote what the west midlands has done, what it is doing now and what it can do in future. It will bring to the west midlands all the major potential inward investors to see for themselves what the west midlands is still capable of. It is the home of the British industrial revolution and is still one of the proudest and most successful industrial manufacturing bases anywhere on earth.

We are looking separately at how we can maximise those strengths that Britain has in the capital goods sector. We exported £9 billion worth of capital goods in 1990. We brought the major companies and major banks together with the Export Credits Guarantee Department to examine our strengths and weaknesses in the highly important sectors of the advancing world to see how we could achieve a much greater rate of success. The companies have decided that, with the right sort of support and organisation, we can increase our sales from £9 billion in 1990 to £27 billion by the year 2000.

We have groups in health, education, power, oil and gas, telecommunications—where GPT recently picked up an order for £40 million in Wuhan in China—water and the environment—which my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham mentioned—airports and transportation. All those groups include a national promoter to chair them —Sir Wilfrid Newton of London Transport chairs the transportation group and Sir Desmond Pitcher chairs the airport group. Their job is to bring together contractors, consultants, subcontractors and major companies, such as National Grid and PowerGen, to ensure that we have a British consortium capable of winning business for United Kingdom plc.

Of course, we understand that there will sometimes be competition between the groups and it will not always be easy, but we have put in place a system that rivals anything that is being offered by the Germans, French, Italians, Japanese or Americans. That is undoubtedly starting to show in the sort of orders mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the issue of power and capital goods, I am unashamedly in favour of Sizewell C and Hunterston C. A problem was acutely outlined to those of us who went to the nuclear forum yesterday. The NNC and others asked how on earth we could continue to improve our levels of exports in the nuclear industry unless the home industry had major projects allowing continuity, either by Nuclear Electric or Scottish Nuclear. What are the Government's reflections on that?

Mr. Needham: I speak as the Minister for Trade. Clearly, in order to sell the nuclear power industry overseas, whether Nuclear Electric, Scottish Nuclear or British Nuclear Fuels, we have to be prepared to support our industry here strongly and openly.

I do not want to make any more party political points, but some Opposition Members make it easy to do so. When we consider Nuclear Electric's proposals for Taiwan it obviously helps, as has been said, to be able to mention successful and continuing developments in the United Kingdom. Therefore, I agree that the basis of a strong export strategy has to be a strong home market. That is why it is vital to pull together the companies to ensure that we are better organised to stand and fight, in our home markets, the competition from outside that is an inevitable consequence of the single market.

We must take that organisation or system vertically and horizontally into the overseas markets. That is true for the water, power, airports, oil and gas and telecommunications industries. The other day, we took to India the telecommunications group, which comprises Cable and Wireless, British Telecom, Racal and GPT, all of which gave presentations on how they felt that they could assist in the telecommunications industry. It was a much more impressive exercise than taking each organisation individually so that each was scrapping with the other.

Of course, some companies will be in existing markets, with existing confidentiality structures, so that they will compete with one another, but there are many opportunities in the world. Britain must organise itself across the capital goods sector. One of the most exciting sectors is education, where Baroness Pauline Perry has done an extraordinary job in bringing together universities, management schools, grammar schools, higher education establishments and technology colleges, and has started to promote and sell the best of British educational quality.

We are now establishing the national vocational qualification system en bloc in Oman. We have opportunities to do the same in Saudi Arabia. We are also looking at opportunities to introduce national vocational qualifications in Malaysia and across the far east. At present, the training is primarily job related; we want to look at skill-related training. If we can achieve and maintain our own quality and keep to our standards, there will be many opportunities for us in the educational sector.

About two weeks ago, we signed a memorandum of understanding to build a British university in Thailand—there may be two British universities in Thailand. The university of London is setting up in Malaysia. The number of students coming here from Taiwan in the past three years has gone up by a factor of three. Across the range of British businesses, there are groups and organisational systems that can deliver aspects of Britain in a coherent way.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): May I say to my right hon. Friend—it is a great pleasure to address him in that way—that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned the opportunity for export. That is one of 126 different nuclear projects that are either going ahead or are likely to proceed. The nuclear industry is one of the industries in which Britain is a world beater. Will my right hon. Friend accept my absolute support for what he said about making possible through the privatisation of the water industry, the presence of world-class activities in industries from Britain? They can now go into markets

where a British presence simply did not exist before and where other countries, particularly France, used to have the field far too much to themselves. There are now huge opportunities for Britain, provided that there is bipartisan support for the activities of those organisations, whether in the nuclear or water industry.

Mr. Needham: I agree with my right hon. Friend. When I deal with the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, I have no doubt that bipartisan support exists. I could not ask for more support than that which I receive from the hon. Gentleman for the proposals and strategies that we are putting forward. I do not want to flatter him too much—he can do without that—but he is almost unique in that capacity. I wish him all power to his elbow in trying to persuade more of his colleagues not only to listen to such debates but to participate in them.

We must, as other countries have done, put across the message and the strategy. All of us, including industry and the trade union movement, must work towards the common cause. The requirements for Britain to survive in the next century include quality, competitiveness and productivity—we must all agree with that.

The Labour party displays indifference, sometimes ignorance, too much carping and, occasionally, contradiction. I hope that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough will not mind my saying that I took time to look in depth at the policies set out in "Winning for Britain", which the hon. Gentleman's boss recently produced. It began with an executive summary—the Labour party is beginning to get the wording right. It stated:

"This document is the result of a year long nationwide consultation by Labour's Trade and Industry Team with those who work in British industry. Its conclusions reflect a consensus about the importance of industry to the British economy and to the future prosperity of the British people."

In the whole document the word "export" is used only once. I do not know to whom in British industry the Labour party spoke, but I find it astonishing that exports should be mentioned only once in a strategic policy document.

It is not only the lack of Labour Members present for this debate that betrays the indifference of the Labour party to these matters. There is also considerable ignorance in the Labour party—again, I exclude the hon. Member for Middlesbrough. The other day, I had occasion to write to the hon. Member for Livingston, who had claimed that the ECGD made a profit of £750 million in 1992-93, and that that money should be used to reduce the premiums. That certainly shows a lack of knowledge and experience on the part of Opposition spokesmen on industry. The fact is that the losses accumulated by the ECGD amount to £3.6 billion. Like any other insurance business, it has to pay off that deficit. It may run up a surplus at times, but the surplus from one year must go to reduce the enormous deficit.

I, therefore, wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 4 May pointing out his mistaken ways and asking him what he would do to the ECGD system and the portfolio management system that we have in place. I asked:

"Is it Labour policy to scrap or change the present system?"

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Livingston is a busy man—the fact that he is not here today is evidence of that. He is busy helping all sorts of people around the country. However, I should like an answer from him; perhaps the hon. Member for Middlesbrough would remind him of his pending tray.

Last week, I listened to the hon. Member for Livingston speaking on "Question Time", when he tried to curry favour with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary by saying that he would help to reduce public expenditure by introducing a minimum wage, thereby doing away with family credit. I was pretty cross when I heard that. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough may take an interest in what follows as he used to be my opposite number for Northern Ireland. What will happen to the women who work in the shirt factories of Derry if we introduce a minimum wage and do away with their family credit? Will the shirt factories be able to pay the minimum wage, so that family credit can be abolished in line with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion?

The answer, of course, is that the ladies in question will lose their jobs. It is arrogant to suggest that those companies can afford to take over the burden, or that the workers will find alternative employment under what the hon. Member for Livingston describes as some form of training for high-technology, high-skill jobs. Of course we all want such jobs, but we cannot put the burden on employers who would then have to put hundreds of thousands of people on low pay out of work. I deplore the arrogance of those who say, "We will retrain them in some fictional skills that will find them alternative work."

Perhaps the hon. Member for Middlesbrough could explain to me why "Winning for Britain" contains no mention of Northern Ireland, even though Wales and Scotland are mentioned. Perhaps the answer is that the Opposition—again I exclude the hon. Gentleman—would like to see Northern Ireland packaged and floated off elsewhere. It is a disgrace to the people of Ulster that the document does not mention Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the hourly wage of the women in the shirt factories in Derry?

Mr. Needham: Two years ago, it was about £120 a week; with bonuses they got £150 a week. If the minimum wage required a minimum payment without bonuses of £150, and it also had to be paid to part-time workers working, say, three days a week and at present topping up their wages with family credit, differentials would be forced up all along the line and the company would become wholly uncompetitive. I have spoken to people in the garment factories of Northern Ireland, and I know that the companies would go out of business—the Opposition should make no mistake about that. Where would the workers find jobs then? It is not good enough for the Labour party to come up with generalised policies without working out their effects on ordinary working people.

"Winning for Britain" contains another extraordinary passage:

"The strong individualism of the Anglo-Saxon business ethic may also inhibit the development of a corporate long-term perspective. British business culture is vulnerable to the vision of the chief executive as hero."

I could understand all that in the context of the hon. Member for Livingston standing for the leadership of the Labour party—but has someone told the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) that British business culture is vulnerable to the vision of the chief executive as hero? How does Labour propose to change the culture of British business? What do the hon. Members for Livingston or for Sedgefield know about British industry? Has either of them ever worked in it? The answer of course is no—

Mr. Donald Anderson *rose*—

Mr. Needham: I accept that the hon. Gentleman may have worked in British industry, which makes him exceptional in his party, but there is one suggestion in "Winning for Britain" with which I have some sympathy: the idea of establishing a university for industry. The first two people who need to attend it and who could learn the most from it would be the hon. Members for Livingston and for Sedgefield.

Mr. Anderson: As someone who has worked in export promotion both in the United Kingdom and abroad, may I appeal to the Minister to make up his mind about whether he wants to enlist the non-partisan support of the whole House for UK plc, or whether he wants to indulge in this sort of party-political knockabout? We can have the latter if he wants it, but it will do nothing for Britain.

Mr. Needham: I understand that point, but on the day the hon. Member for Sedgefield has released his "Change and National Renewal" document, an endless attack on what he sees as the incompetence of the Government in running industrial policy for the past 15 years, he cannot expect me not to reply in kind. The hon. Gentleman should be on the Opposition Front Bench to speak for industry. Meanwhile, he must allow me to explain what the effects of Labour policy would be on British industry.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield claims for his goals:

"We are not going back to the past, nor drifting without purpose, as Britain is at present."

It is the Labour party which is drifting. Then comes the astonishing phrase:

"Labour will open up greater opportunities for the retraining of those in work by ensuring that every company invests in upgrading the skills of the work force."

There could be no stronger statement than that, but he continues:

"the objective will be to encourage."

Would someone explain to me how greater opportunities will be opened up by mere encouragement? That is yet another statement of policy not backed up by any realistic ideas for action. The Opposition berate us continually about the importance of the manufacturing base and throw extraordinary statistics at us. The other day, the hon. Member for Livingston said that our manufacturing investment is now one tenth of what it was in the 1970s. That is just not true. The document says:

"The old debate whether manufacturing or services is the more virtuous is pointless and sterile. In the first place, the dividing line between them is increasingly hard to define. The highest value added in computer application is now software programing. It is simply meaningless to go on drawing a distinction between the production of hardware as a manufacturing process and design itself."

What do Opposition Members want? Either manufacturing is that important or it is not. They cannot continue having it both ways. The hon. Member for Livingston said:

"The turn of the century could make or break Britain. If we are not by then making the things that the world wants to buy we will not be making a living in the world."

How on earth are we to make a living in the world with a minimum wage and the social costs of the social chapter wrapped round our necks? If we are to succeed with Britain in manufacturing we have to create, on the back of the policies that the Government introduced in the 1980s, the sorts of strategy for partnership that I have just been suggesting to the House.

To return to the issue of bipartisanship, I accept that there are people such as Bill Jordan and the Amalgamated Engineering Union who have got that message. It said:

"British industry is undergoing a period of change, of growing prosperity."—

this was the AEU talking, not me talking. That was not a Conservative party broadsheet. It continued:

"This has been directly attributable to the influx of inward investors wishing to use our plants and our labour."

How many times have we heard that from the Labour party? [HON. MEMBERS: "Never."] Never. What about the policies of the Labour party? One of its policies is to support trans-European networks in transport and telecommunications. Trans-European networks are enormously expensive and costly and mean that British taxpayers' money would be used to improve Greek and Portuguese roads. It would not do not anything here.

The second part of the Labour party's policy is to establish a network of regional development agencies to empower local business and community leaders to take local decisions that shape their regional economy. Is that Dolly Kiffin? Is that Mr. Stafford? Who are those community leaders who shall determine the regional economy? Is that the best that Labour party can do? I am sorry if it upsets the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), but I am not going to sit here and say that the criticisms that the Opposition Members make, the knocking comedy that they write and the policies that they come up with are anything other than amateur. That is the nicest thing that I can say.

We are in a position where we can take advantage. Since 1981, the volume of manufactured exports in Britain has grown faster than in France, Germany, Italy or Japan. Our share of world trade has now stabilised. We are exporting 20 per cent. per head more than Japan and 85 per cent. more than the United States. Our visible deficit has improved since the start of 1993. Our exports for the quarter ending May 1994 are 9.5 per cent. up by value in comparison to May 1993. Over the past 15 years, the Conservative party has put in place the revolutionary changes that give us the platform from which British exports can take off in the 1990s. The only party that has any concept of how to do it and any plan for doing it is the one that forms the Government, and we intend to ensure that it stays that way.

5.32 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to see you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Chair again. One of the great difficulties in debates that deal with subjects which are important but, nevertheless technical is the tendency to try to make them lively rather than like a funeral oration. One can hardly say that the speech of the Minister for Trade was anything like a funeral oration. As Charlie Chaplin once said, "Enthusiasm is the thing." We have long admired the Minister's enthusiasm and we witnessed a great example of it again today.

The Minister mentioned a number of issues, such as hope, opportunity, and the two revolutionary changes. He also managed to bring in the subject of the railway strike. Opposition Members are constantly peppered and bombarded with views on the railway strike. I can give the Minister a view clearly, simply and without hesitation. After all the changes in the Thatcher years, after all the changes and reforms in the trade unions, the management of a company is unable to avoid a strike, and after 13, 14 or 15 years, we have a Government who intervene. Then they ask us who is to blame and where we stand. Honestly and categorically, the management has failed if it has got

itself into a strike situation under the legislation of the Thatcherite years. The failure is a failure of management; my hon. Friends and I clearly state that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Bell: I do not intend to give way to the hon. Gentleman at this point and I will tell him why. I have sat with him during many debates on Fridays, Mondays, and so on and he begins to intervene about one minute into a speech and he continues to intervene throughout the debate. I am sure that he will find another point in my speech when he may intervene and I shall be glad at that stage to give way to him.

The Minister talks about the dawn of a new era—a statement made by Bill Jordan, for whom I have a great deal of sympathy, respect and support. The great dawn of a new era, which is frightening the wits out of the Conservatives in the House and in the country, and even Conservative central office, is the possible election of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) as leader of the Labour party. At business questions time earlier, we heard questions about the education of my hon. Friend's children. It shows how deeply the fear runs through the Conservative party when it has to try to score a point by bringing in the children of a future leader of the Labour party in that way. The dawn of a new era, to which Bill Jordan referred, will come about quickly with the election of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield as the leader of the Labour party. The changes that will come about as a result of his leadership will be every reason for concern to the Conservatives.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Bell: I shall go through the points made by the Minister for Trade on an ad hoc basis, if the Minister and the House do not mind. Later in my speech, I shall be glad to give way to Conservative Members.

The Minister for Trade mentioned trade union leaders running the country. There was beer and sandwiches at No. 10 Downing street on just one occasion—in 1965, when there was a railway strike. There was only one occasion, and it was nearly 30 years ago. The Conservatives have had wonderful mileage out of that over the years. We may talk about trade unions leaders running the country, but now we have nobody running the country. That is one of the consequences of 15 years of Conservative rule.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The hon. Member is rewriting history.

Mr. Bell: I am not rewriting it at all; I am responding to the Minister for Trade. I shall make my own comments later.

The Minister talked of the first revolutionary change, which was to deal with trade union reform and trade union law. It was my noble Friend Lady Castle who tried to reform the trade unions with the document "In Place of Strife" way back in the 1960s. We have sought constantly to change trade union relationships with Government. The President of the Board of Trade, in his book entitled "Where there's a Will", supported the concept of the National Economic Development Office—a relationship between trade unions, Government and management. It was his concept and he wanted to support it, but the former Chancellor of the Exchequer abolished it as soon as the President of the Board of Trade took his post so as to be sure that the Department of Trade and Industry did not gain any pre-eminence over the Treasury.

Labour Members are happy to go along with trade union reform. We are happy to accept those reforms that have been put on the statute book by the Government over the years and which are accepted by the trade unions themselves. We will reform the relationship with the trade unions by putting into that relationship a package of rights for part-time workers.

The Minister also referred to the subject of a national minimum wage, so I will move it up a little on my agenda. It was a travesty for the right hon. Gentleman to use his experience as a Northern Ireland Minister to threaten those who work in the shirt factories of Derry with our national minimum wage as he has perceived it, conceived it and interpreted it, and to say that they will lose their jobs. The onus is on the Opposition in the two to three years ahead to consider the concept of a national minimum wage to help the low-paid workers and those who are sweated labour in our society and to give them a proper minimum wage. How we do that is a matter for us to work on so that it does not not put low-paid workers out of work and does not affect piece-rate workers adversely. We can do it and we will do it.

The Minister said that we had maintained our level of world trade, but he did not mention the fact that the French have increased their share of world trade—and they have both a national minimum wage and the social chapter. We shall not have such a diversity of interpretation—

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bell: No. I am answering all the points made by the Minister for Trade. I shall then come to my speech, when I shall be happy to give way.

Mr. Needham: The point that I was making—and I should like the hon. Gentleman's view on it—was that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that one of the ways in which he wanted to reduce public expenditure was through employers taking up the minimum wage costs, which would reduce the costs of family credit. The introduction of the minimum wage, which would minimise family credit, would inevitably put the lower paid out of work. There is no question about that.

Mr. Bell: I understand the Minister's point. I did not see the programme to which he referred earlier, but I was told that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was the best of all the candidates for the leadership of the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield has made it clear that our minimum wage will be worked out on a common-sense basis. There is no question of its threatening the jobs of the low paid or of piece workers and it will not interfere with training schemes. Between now and the general election, we shall not allow the Conservative Government—who will then become the Conservative Opposition—to dictate and define what Labour's national minimum wage will be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), whom I am glad to see in the Chamber, mentioned exchange rate policy. We could discuss that for some time. There was a devaluation on 15 September two years ago and the value of the pound has been modified. The exchange rate policy between 1979 and 1981 pushed

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up the pound's value to $2.50. That decimated our industry. We have not heard from the Minister, in his first revolution, about how 1 million jobs were lost between 1979 and 1981 as a consequence of an exchange rate policy which damaged our exports and destroyed or almost destroyed many of our manufacturing companies. It left us at the end of the recession not leaner and fitter, but worse off and, years on, still struggling to achieve anything.

The Minister was carried away by his own enthusiasm, saying that the Labour party was like something from 1780. I remind him that that was even before the time of Napoleon.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Another major deterrent to our exporters is the discordant note being sounded by the Cabinet and members of the Conservative party on European policy. One thing is crystal clear: the Americans and the Japanese view Europe as one market, but they are not sure whether Britain wants to be part of that single market or not. While diverse voices come from the Government because of their internal contradictions, that will be a major constraint on our export efforts.

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for my hon. Friend's interventions. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield has spoken of drift and we see it in the Government's position on Europe. On the one hand, Britain is in the heart of Europe; on the other, it supports a two-speed Europe. The Government speak with one voice in this House and with another in Brussels. The Foreign Secretary must be seriously depressed when he has to say one thing at an international conference and then return here and say something different. On the last occasion, he simply said that he would leave it to the Cabinet to decide. That smacks of really firm government. It is certainly evidence of the drift referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield.

The Minister for Trade was happy to refer to 1780, but he failed to refer to the trade balance in manufactures in 1979 compared with 1993. The Minister knows that I have the utmost respect for him both as an individual and as a Minister. We are pleased that 90 people from the private sector are working at the Department of Trade and Industry. We welcome the sector by sector approach. The Minister's use of the term "godfather" was possibly a little out of place in relation to staff at the DTI, but we can get over that. We welcome grandfathering, which is better than godfathering—

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said that he feared for Britain's position as a destination for foreign investment. Does the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) accept that Britain attracts more inward investment than any other Community country? The over-bureaucratised, over-centralised, over-socialised Europe that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends foresee is certainly not the kind of place where our Japanese, American or other friends would wish to invest.

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman illustrates one of the difficulties of believing one's own propaganda. It is often said that inward investment from countries such as Japan and the United States is greater in Britain than in other Community countries, but that is not so. There is massive investment in France and there will be massive investment in Finland and other countries—*[Interruption.]* We shall not fall for the myths and shibboleths of Conservative Members.

The hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) referred to the socialisation of Europe, the social chapter and social laws. Can he explain why Germany has the strongest economy in Europe although it has the social chapter? Why is France doing so well when it has both a national minimum wage and the social chapter? It is because the framework is right. Those who are in work invest their time in their place of work and they understand the need for productivity, output and security.

The Minister for Trade gave us welcome information about India and the £2 billion worth of orders coming from 15 different sectors. We welcome the fact that the export credit guarantees are being used. I almost made a trip to Bangalore with the Minister. The programme was extremely strenuous. He spent a day there, but that was obviously sufficient for him to build it up as the city of the next century. We welcome the use of Concorde to carry 100 British business men to India and to carry 100 Indian business men back. We also welcome the programme for the capital goods sector, seeking to move orders from £9,000 million to £27,000 million by the year 2000.

The Minister referred to UK plc. When he looks again at "Winning for Britain" he will see a number of paragraphs on that. He spoke of Britain competing on level terms with Germany, France, Japan and America. We must ask whether the packages are the same. Do we have the right package to enable us to compete with the French and the Germans? Our exporters tell us that that is not the case and that the French and the Germans have better packages.

The Minister comes to the House and pleases his Back Benchers and I wish him well. However, exporters still tell us that Britain's package is not so good as—

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bell: I have not reached my speech yet, so I will not give way. The debate is about the opportunities for exporters, but the Minister spent at least 25 minutes making a political attack on the Opposition. I intend to respond to every point of his attack before I get to my speech on the opportunities for exporters.

Mr. Donald Anderson: There is some concern about export promotion agencies. France and Germany are organised differently in terms of chambers of commerce and so on. Is my hon. Friend aware that there is now a real danger of a substantial cut in the number of our overseas diplomatic posts due to Government policy failures? That is bound to have adverse repercussions on the ability of our exporters to continue to get the assistance to which they have become accustomed.

Mr. Bell: Such cuts also have an impact on the country where they are made. When I visited Australia last summer, I heard it said that past cuts had sent a signal to the Australian Government that we were not so enthusiastic about Australia as we might have been. It is the language of the Minister to support our exports, but it is the language of the Treasury to cut back. We have yet to hear what will be the impact of the latest spending plans which were discussed at No. 10 Downing street today. How will they affect export credit guarantees and export posts?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I do not apologise for calling him my friend earlier.

The hon. Gentleman said that he does not believe Tory party propaganda on inward investment. Does he accept the United States survey which showed that of current business prepared by MITI more than 39 per cent. of all inward investment into European Community countries from Japan comes to the United Kingdom? We also enjoy a similar proportion of US investment. The nearest country to the UK in this respect is Germany, where inward investment from Japan is well under 20 per cent. The hon. Gentleman may accept that information from an independent source.

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful to hear from the hon. Lady, but she did not distinguish between manufacturing and service investment. She had better take a good look at those figures and establish whether financial services are included. One thinks, for instance, of the Paris and Frankfurt exchanges. Using sound bite figures on the Floor of the House is dangerous.

The Minister referred to the nuclear industry—

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Oh no.

Mr. Bell: If the hon. Gentleman will listen, he may learn something. If he insists on making sedentary interventions, he will learn nothing. The House may find that I am writing Labour party policy as I go along, much to the benefit of the House and the country. The hon. Gentleman must be patient.

We accept the Minister's point that a strong, viable and expanding UK nuclear industry can link with technology which helps to increase exports. We are aware also that Sizewell C would create 10,000 jobs. However, we are still waiting for the Government's nuclear review. It is a bit hard to ask the Labour party for its policy when there is no Government policy. It is difficult to give answers when the Government have not yet stated their own policy.

I shall now move on to my own speech.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that he has been making a speech for the last 20 minutes. I presume that he was referring to the way in which his speech was prepared —off the cuff or prepackaged.

Mr. Bell: At least the package is my own work. I do not have four civil servants in the Box behind me. When we debated insurance the other day, there were 12 civil servants in the Box. My speech in answer to the Minister is my own work, but it was also partly prepared earlier. Nevertheless, it will refer to many of the points made by the Minister.

We have twice debated exports and the Minister was absent on both occasions. We saw this afternoon the fervour and enthusiasm that we missed. His speech today was enthusiastic and critical of the Opposition, and I hope that it will serve to keep him in his job. However, I can reveal that the Minister need not worry so much. He does not have to attack the Opposition to keep his job as Minister for Trade. The reshuffle has already happened and the names are already decided. They have all been put in a safe at No. 10, and they will be taken out at the appropriate time. If the number of Government seats in the European elections had fallen to seven or eight, those names would have been produced the next day and Ministers would have been put out of their misery. As it is, they will probably hang on until July. I have said publicly —I put my two pennyworth on the table—that I hope that the Minister will keep his job because of his enthusiasm, energy and attacking approach to exports.

It was not always thus. The Minister said that the word "exports" appeared only twice in our document, "Winning for Britain," which is about 40 pages long. I invite him to read Lord Lawson's book, "The View from No. 11," which runs to about 1,100 pages. He will not find the word "exports" anywhere in its index. The book by the President of the Board of Trade, "Where There's a Will," shows in its index entries for "Eggar", "energy", "English Development Agency" and "environment"—but none for "exports". We welcome the Government's change of attitude since 1992 with the appointment of the Minister for Trade, but what were they doing in the 13 years before that? The view was never held in the last Parliament or the penultimate one that emphasis must be placed on exports. They were seen as important, but not that important, and the same applied to industry. The prevalent view was that our balance of payments was not a constraint on macro-economic policy. The Government were able to take that view because of North sea oil and a drop in demand for imports. The current account stayed in surplus until 1986, even though unemployment was rising throughout that time, reflecting a drop in gross domestic product. The current account went into deficit as a consequence of the Lawson-induced boom to win the 1987 general election.

I add in parentheses that our North sea oil account is again in surplus. In the first five months of this year, there was a £36 million oil surplus, compared with a £1.38 billion deficit in the 1993 calendar year. North sea oil masked the progressive deterioration in our trade balance in manufactures throughout the 1980s. When the Minister spoke of his two revolutions, he did not mention the two revolutions of the recessions of 1979-1981 and of 1991. Those were difficult times for business men trying to stay in business during a recession.

Regardless of the Minister's energy, which we applaud, and his commitment to improving Britain's export performance, the lack of overall Government policy means that while our share of world trade remains the same, that of France increases—notwithstanding that country's social chapter and its continued presence in the exchange rate mechanism. France is still part of that mechanism in Europe and Britain is not. The failure of the 1980s remains the most persistent obstacle when the Minister seeks to improve Britain's share of world trade.

We have seen a failure to pay sufficient attention to investment and the encouragement of excessive dividends even in time of recession, as opposed to investment. We have seen a failure to pay sufficient attention to training, and to create a framework for research and development. What kind of economy must we have to provide the wherewithal for our exporters? The Minister did not say that we have a lopsided and destabilised economy which survives on a wing and a prayer. It has external deficits, is debt ridden and has slow growth and high unemployment. That is what the Government describe as a success story. If the economy is as it should be in accordance with the gospel according to the Minister, why has it not been

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perceived as such by the electorate? Why have the Government lost both local government and European elections?

I was rather surprised to note that the Minister spent more time on the Opposition document, "Winning for Britain" than on the White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win".

Mr. Needham: It is very good.

Mr. Bell: The only good things about it are the index and the glossary of terms.

The White Paper attempts to mask the Government's massive failure. It attempts to scatter its shot far and wide. It seeks to mask the fact that if we are to improve our ability to sell goods and services abroad, a change in economic policy is required. We need a policy that provides more skills and training, is designed for the long term rather than the short term, creates a proper and more appropriate balance between investment and dividends, directs itself through training to the problem of skill shortages, and which believes in Britain rather than hoping for the best for Britain. I remind the Minister that Charles Dickens and Mr. Micawber are dead: hoping for something to turn up does not represent the best economic policy on which to create our so-called opportunities for exporters.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) revealed his concern for environmental protection when he pointed out that the White Paper cost £600 per page. He hit the nail on the head equally well when he said that it contained

"no new ideas on investment, research and development or training, and no strategy to restore the strength of Britain's manufacturing industry"—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 226.]

The Labour party has argued that there is a theoretical case for free trade in that it is meant to provide the most efficient producers with access to world markets. That creates lower prices and forces domestic producers to be more efficient. Consumers and the most efficient companies benefit and therefore there is a public interest in offering choice through free trade. I was interested to note that the White Paper calls for "fair and open markets". That is a better definition than free trade. The Opposition and the Government are almost in agreement on that because fair and balanced trade is not far removed from "fair and open markets".

Mr. Jacques Arnold: How would it help free trade if we pursued the Labour party's calls for action against what it describes as social dumping, which means the export from the third world of products produced more cheaply than the developed world can produce them? Surely if we block such social dumping we shall be doing a disservice to the developing world. Will the hon. Gentleman explain Labour party policy on that?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for the opportunity to explain Labour party policy to the hon. Member.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman makes it up as he goes along.

Mr. Bell: No, I do not. It is all written down in my speech. The hon. Member for Gravesham asked a question and then answered it himself. Social dumping has nothing to do with workers' rights and I shall make that distinction when I get to that part of my speech. The hon. Member will not be forgotten.

Mr. McLoughlin: What about social dumping?

Mr. Bell: We shall get to that; there is no need to worry —this is called a structured speech.

A section of the White Paper refers to trade, but the Minister for Trade did not refer to it. I have read the entire document and consigned it to my heart. It refers to trade policy, export promotion, measures to combat unfair subsidies, state aid and inward and outward investment. It is all there. We welcome the emphasis that is placed on those considerations. No doubt the other half of the team —two Ministers are here, in tandem—will refer to them in replying to the debate.

We also welcome the initiatives that are referred to in the document—but which, once again, the Minister failed to mention—to link the Department of Trade and Industry with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to provide United Kingdom business with help overseas.

Mr. Needham: I mentioned that.

Mr. Bell: Not in relation to the White Paper.

We welcome the Treasury's grudging admission that trade might matter after all—that it is not simply a matter of financing deficits across the exchanges—and its involvement in attempts to win overseas contracts. We welcome the fact that Overseas Trade Services has reached thousands of small firms through the publicity about new opportunities for business with India. I noted what the Minister said about the initiatives listed in the White Paper for trade with India in 1994, including plans for a major promotional event in Delhi in November focusing on smaller firms producing high-technology products. I assume that that is what the Minister had in mind when he referred to Concorde flying back and forth to India.

The Opposition have noted that the United Kingdom is the second biggest foreign investor in the United States and accounts for more than 20 per cent. of the $419 billion invested by foreign enterprises. I do not get around as much as the Minister, but I managed to get to Australia last year and I was in Washington recently. I can testify to the seriousness that the commercial section at our embassy attaches to trade. I note that within the manufacturing sector United Kingdom investment stands at more than $40 billion, making it the biggest foreign investor in the United States.

The Labour party accepts that we are in a global economy, as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) made plain. We accept that large-scale investment in the United States is necessary as part of that global economy. The Opposition accept that other considerations must be taken into account over and beyond simply investing in our country. Those considerations are important to outward investment and such investment is linked to inward investment, as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham said. In turn, it is ultimately linked to fair and open trade in fair and open markets.

The Minister was kind enough to refer to my attempts to involve myself, as a member of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, with his office. He has been courteous enough to invite me over to explain many of the Government

initiatives. He has also given me various documents about those initiatives to study. I thank him for his gracious behaviour.

The Minister said that he had a strategy, but we cannot discern where it is. We understand where he wants to go and how he wants to do that, but where is that over-arching strategy? The efforts of the Minister and his Department must be considered against the fact that our non-oil trade deficit is likely to increase. This is when we come to the facts, not the myths—the reality, rather than the perception of it in which the hon. Member for Gravesham seems to like to live.

Our exports will not benefit fully from an increase in world trade. Even the devaluation of the pound will not prevent our trade position from deteriorating. Even the benefits that arose from the competitive devaluation in September 1992 are already fading. If our exports are to pick up in relation to imports, our growth rate will have to be slower than that of our overseas competitors.

Conservative Members should listen carefully to this part of my speech because, given the rosy description of our exports and our economy, they must wonder why the Governor of the Bank of England is talking about raising interest rates. If things are looking so good, surely they must wonder why interest rates may have to go up. That is the dilemma that the Government face, because they cannot create sustainable and non-inflationary growth through their policies. They cannot break out of the stop-go cycle. We are already suffering from the threat of slower growth or at least growth being curtailed—that will mean that it cannot reduce our unemployment rate—because of the threat of interest rate rises.

At least the Governor of the Bank of England is no longer saying that if interest rates are increased it will all be because of the workers. In the past, the workers got the blame for everything. In this case, he has said that it is not a question of pay rises, but the fact that the economy is over-heating. The fact that the Government cannot even sustain modest growth in the economy without running into balance of payments constraints and having to talk about increasing interest rates is a measure of the failure of their policies overall. I am not talking about the Minister, but about his right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury. I am not alone in that view. Nomura Research Institute Europe Ltd. points out clearly what the Opposition have known all along, which is that the current account does matter. A current account deficit can be financed—that is obvious—but it can be financed only by leading to slower growth, higher inflation, weaker exchange rates and higher short and long-term interest rates. That will happen in our country, but not in countries with current account surpluses. The proof of the pudding is Germany.

The Minister was right to touch, albeit briefly, on the emphasis on opportunities for exports. He was right to exhort those in the export business to more effort. He knows in his heart of hearts that if the United Kingdom Government cannot bridge or reduce the current account gap, the economy will remain unstable.The Minister is right to bring to the attention of the House the opportunities that he is making available through the Government. He is right, by implication, to distance himself from the so-called Thatcher years.

Is it not truly astonishing, even at this time, that more help is not available to our exporters from our banks? I pray in aid, if not in comfort, the second survey of international services provided to exporters commissioned by the Institute of Export and NCM Credit Insurance Ltd. The 1994 survey of exporters shows that one in four businesses does not use banks to finance its export business. It shows that banks remain the initial source of general advice for exporters, but that the quality of service provided has improved only marginally. It shows that 49 per cent. of those surveyed remain unhappy with the attitude of the banks and that three out of four companies with turnovers below £10 million fail to receive an advance from their bankers.

The failure by banks to finance overseas debts was commented on by many companies. The banks have lost their identity, if not their soul. They have certainly lost the focus of their business, which has been destroyed—like so much else in the Thatcher years—so that they look to profits from the capital markets rather than assisting small businesses. It is that lackadaisical approach to exports that the Department of Trade and Industry must tackle if the Minister wishes to maintain the impetus of his initiative.

I must tell the Minister that there is some unease about the creation of 11 regional offices with 185 staff. The plethora of export information in the past has caused some confusion among companies and they are wondering where it will all lead with the reorganisation of regional centres. Small businesses do not like confusion, especially when it relates to a Government Department or affects export potential. The existing regional offices of the Department of Trade and Industry receive commendations and are used by two out of three existing companies. However, some effort of communication, information and even reassurance will be needed to maintain that confidence in the new regional centres.

I now come to the point made by the hon. Member for Gravesham. The Government have not achieved all that they might have done through financial services and the general agreement on tariffs and trade. That was the point that I wanted to make to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham. It is convenient to base the investment on manufacturing investment, but as hon. Members know, investment in the service industries is equally important. We had a canter around that paddock earlier in the week when we debated GATT. At that time, we were reminded that 23 per cent. of our exports come from services, which amounts to about £23,000 million a year. We were also reminded that we are the fourth exporter of invisibles in the world. We had a little bit of that yesterday when we were told by the Minister that

the President of the Board of Trade is in the land of the midnight sun".—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 217.]

We are happy for him to be there to discuss invisible exports.

Why were we not able to make greater progress in financial services in the latest round of GATT negotiations? Why did not the Minister refer to that? Perhaps his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will refer to it later. What were the Government up to? What representations did they make to Sir Leon Brittan? What representations were made by the City of London—that great bastion of enterprise? I am glad to see the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) in his place. I hope that he will make a contribution.

Why did we not make a greater point about financial services? Why did we fail to make greater leeway in the GATT accord on a matter that touches 23 per cent. of our exports? We have been told often enough in the Chamber that Sir Leon Brittan is running for the presidency of the

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European Commission. As a former Member of the House we wish him well. But where was our case on financial services? What were we afraid of? Where are we going now? Perhaps we shall get to that when we learn from the President of the Board of Trade—

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I require your guidance. I commend the brave attempt by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) to speak alone for the Labour party. However, you will have noticed that there are many Conservative Members who wish to make a brief contribution to the debate. Would it not be advisable if, unusually, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough were allowed to speak again halfway through the proceedings to give us the second half of his speech? Then, instead of having to speak with a modular expandable speech which may go on for two hours to compensate for the total of one and a half hours of speeches from Conservative Members, we would have a more orderly debate and a wider variety of contributions. I say this in all sincerity and flattery for the hon. Gentleman. He should get a medal for what he is doing tonight. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will send a memo to the leader of the Labour party to say that, unsupported, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough has done a sterling job. However, in the interests of the House, could we have an unorthodox procedure in terms of calling people to speak?

Madam Deputy Speaker: In contrast to the flamboyant remarks of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), the short answer is no.

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for an intervention from the hon. Gentleman, even though it was on a point of order. I know that he works well and closely with the Institute of Directors and I have had dealings with him on that subject. I simply wish to remind him of the maiden speech of Benjamin Disraeli, who was also heard by an almost empty House. He ended his speech by saying, "You will remember me." I am sure that when we fight the general election in 1997, Conservative Members will be astonished and, I hope, pleasantly surprised to see how much Labour party policy they find in my speech tonight.

To return to the pre-packaged part of my speech, financial services are important. During the GATT debate my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), in his second speech in the Chamber, referred to the Minister for Industry who had been to Marrakesh to sign the GATT agreement. My hon. Friend asked why the Government had sent a grocer to Marrakesh. I found that amusing.

Mr. Needham: It was offensive.

Mr. Bell: It was not offensive; it was amusing. It reminded me of what Winston Churchill once said: some chicken, some neck—it takes a lot of gall for an Opposition Member to refer to Benjamin Disraeli and Winston Churchill in the same speech—and I thought: some grocer, some Minister.

The Minister for Industry was right in his speech the other night to refer to the benefits that come from the GATT round. The Government will need to pursue vigorously the question of financial services. They will need to pursue the issues of banking, insurance, securities, telecommunications, maritime services, aerospace and steel. Attention will have to paid to these matters in relation to GATT for some time, certainly for the next two to three years.

We often hear the question—and we shall hear it increasingly in relation to my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield—"Where's the beef?" The beef is, of course, in the hamburger. During the GATT negotiations, did the Government know what they wanted in terms of exports? Where was the overarching strategy? Where was the beef in the Government's policy? The document entitled, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" is not a policy document—it is pious aspiration dressed up as a policy document.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What about social dumping?

Mr. Bell: I shall come to that in a moment.

What the Government should do but are not doing is arrest the decline in our exports. They cannot increase exports, only maintain them. GATT might be said to provide an opportunity, and that opportunity will come through the World Trade Organisation. The Minister did not refer to our trade dispute with Malaysia, although he has been there. I hope that such disputes in future will be handled through the new WTO. Incidentally, we are pleased to note that in May our exports to Malaysia were £161 million; in April they were £110 million and in January £78 million. We shall, however, need to examine ways of democratising the WTO and how we can make it more accountable.

The President of the Board of Trade's visit yesterday to Helsinki has already been mentioned. We shall be looking for an early statement from him and we shall be asking whether his meeting there was consultative or indicative, whether it affected the WTO, whether it arose out of the Uruguay round of GATT, whether it affects bilateral trading in services between nations and, indeed, whether financial services such as banking, insurance and securities were topics of discussion. We know how the President of the Board of Trade respects the House and his Department's Question Time, and we shall be anxious to hear his views at an early date—not too early, however, as I shall not be here on Monday.

The hon. Member for Gravesham has been very patient in waiting for a response for his comment on social dumping. This is rather like a television series where one has to wait until after the advertisements—we are getting there now. We need to strengthen the environmental aspects of GATT, although that is not a matter dear to the Government's heart. Over the years, we shall write into GATT an appropriate chapter or clause on workers' rights. The hon. Member for Gravesham seems to confuse social dumping with workers' rights, but there is no comparison between the two.

The Labour party, the Americans, the French and the Government—I shall deal with them in a moment—are saying that a nation's economy can be developed within a framework of workers' rights which not only assists that nation's exports, but improves its standards of living and makes it a nation of consumers, as well as producers, so that it can import goods that we manufacture. The hon. Gentleman should therefore get away from the idea of social dumping and consider a proper framework of workers' rights going hand in hand with fair and balanced trade.

When he wound up our recent debate on GATT, the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs revealed something that I, however, knew already because the American Administration had told me. If they had not done so, I do not know how long I should have had to wait to hear it from the Government, but, in any event, I heard it from the Government on Monday night. I heard that the Government have agreed to promote proper analytical work by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to examine workers' rights and ascertain where there are problems that need to be dealt with. That means that the Government are examining workers' rights in relation to trade and that we are beginning to move towards the position held by France and the United States, no matter how the Government dress it up.

Over and above the practical opportunities for exporters, which we welcome as a change from the so-called Thatcher years, the Department will have to work harder on a strategy. They cannot simply hope that this document represents a strategy. It places little importance on the difference between high and low technology. The Government appear to believe that competitiveness is a matter of price, not quality. They will have to work much harder on a strategy if they want to persuade us that they know where they are going.

As I have already said, we accept that there has been a change in attitude since 1992, since the Minister took on his portfolio. It is now accepted that exports count, that the external deficit counts, that manufacturing counts and that the economy cannot for ever continue on a wing and a prayer. His own vigorous efforts should be matched by a properly thought out, overarching strategy as well as tactics.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), who is taking such an interest in the length of my speech, might like to know that I am on the last page of the first instalment. With the leave of the House, I shall later wind up on behalf of the Opposition.

When I was preparing my contribution to the debate on GATT, I referred to the line:

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small".

Most Conservatives recognised the line, but did not, of course, know the following line, of which I am happy to remind them. The poem continues:

"Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all".

The Minister can have tactics and initiatives. but at the end of the day he still has to face the voters and when he and his party do so he will meet the same fate because, with patience, the public and the electorate stand waiting and with exactness they will grind all.

6.26 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) is held in very high regard by Conservative Members. There was therefore a tingle of anticipation on this side of the House when he said that he was going to talk about Labour party policy and make up much of it on the hoof. He told us several times and with pride that it was all his own work—my speech, too, is all my own work—but we were disappointed to hear so little about Labour party policy.

The only thing that we managed to prise out of the hon. Gentleman was something about social dumping, a line that he was thrown by one of my colleagues. It was a disappointing speech, because it did not tell us more about what the Labour party has in mind for us.

Mr. Fabricant: It took 55 minutes.

Mr. Marland: Yes, it was a long speech.

I begin by complimenting my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on all the energy that he has expended in trying to stimulate trade for this country. His travel schedule has been punishing and has earned him the respect not only of the people who travelled with him but that of many hon. Members of all parties. I hope that he will have the health and strength to keep going.

It will probably come as no surprise to my right hon. Friend to know that it is my intention not to speak about Lloyd's. *[Interruption.]* It probably will come as a surprise, in fact. I wish to speak about the problems facing the recycling industry. My interest in its efforts are well catalogued, and my right hon. Friend the Minister has shown considerable interest in the difficulties facing the industry. I have talked to him about them several times. What are the problems facing the United Kingdom's metal, textile and paper recyclers? How do I want the Department of Trade and Industry to help?

The problem, simply put, is one of definition. Well-intentioned legislation is placing unnecessary and ill-considered regulation in the way of developing businesses in this sphere. That regulation is beginning seriously to hamper their development, jeopardising their exports and adding considerably to their costs and paperwork. In short, the European Union's definition of waste needs to be amended.

Before I outline the problem in more detail, let me give the House some idea of the scale and breadth of the metal recovery industry in the United Kingdom. Each week, the industry collects 175 tonnes of reusable metal, 30,000 old motor cars, 30,000 refrigerators, 20,000 washing machines and a further 20,000 assorted white goods—items such as cookers, dryers and deep freezes. In addition, it collects huge quantities of industrial, demolition and constructional reusable material, as well as ships, torpedoes, telephones, old bicycles, discarded House of Commons metal chairs and paper clips.

That reclamation activity saves in energy terms the equivalent of 140,000 gallons of petrol for each 1,000 tonnes of new steel produced from recovered metal rather than refining original ore.

The environmental advantages are also obvious, yet the important recycling business, along with the textile and other recycling and exporting businesses, is now under threat from ill-defined and ill-considered legislation, which insists that, irrespective of evidence to the contrary, the metal recovery industry is merely a waste disposal industry, and that those businesses are merely handlers of waste.

The misconception spreads throughout Europe and beyond. Last year, the ferrous reclamation industry collected, processed and sold more than 9 million tonnes of iron and steel. Nearly 4 million tonnes of that recovered metal was sold abroad; hence my interest in today's debate on exports. The trade was market driven, and brought more than £300 million to the United Kingdom in overseas earnings.

Today, however, the United Kingdom metal recycling industry, together with other recycling interests, faces the

[Mr. Marland]

greatest threat to its activities since the era of export controls pre-1979. The heart of the problem is the misconception that valuable recovered metal, prepared and sold for melting into new steel, is waste and that it should be controlled in the same way as harmful waste for disposal.

It is not merely a domestic problem, as I shall explain. The recycling industry needs help from the Government at home and abroad to change the definition of waste.

So where did that well-intended, but ill-considered, legislation come from? It was the Basel convention. Quite rightly, the Basel convention seeks to control and reduce the export of hazardous waste from developed countries to developing countries. Furthermore, at its second conference, the Basel convention banned all movements of hazardous waste destined for recycling or recovery from OECD to non-OECD countries from 1 January 1998. On the face of it, that sounds a good idea, but the definition of waste under the Basel convention is very broad, as is the classification "hazardous", and that brings problems to the industry.

In a forum dominated by Greenpeace International, and with civil service experts from participating countries' environmental departments only, there is a real risk that the balance will swing too far, so that recovered and processed material could be considered as hazardous waste. I have examples of just that happening.

The OECD proposed a separate regime for the trans-frontier shipment of wastes for recovery, dividing such wastes into red, amber and green lists. Why should recovered and processed metal, together with other material, be regarded as waste, when these products have been bought by the recipient and are to be reused as a raw material? The difficulty is that some countries may and do place restrictions on the trade, simply because the material appears as waste, irrespective of which category of waste it is.

The European Union seeks to regulate the movement of waste into, out of and within the Community along the same lines as the OECD, using the categories green, amber and red. While green wastes are subject only to normal commercial regulations, non-OECD countries can insist that such wastes are controlled as if they were amber or red-listed. That means that, after 1 January 1998, exports of green-listed recovered metals, papers and textiles could be banned.

It is interesting, if horrifying, to note that, only last month, at an international reclamation and recycling convention, a senior official of the Spanish Government spoke with some passion of his country's refusal to import waste. Quite obviously, he had not done his homework and did not understand his own regulations, as Spain currently imports 3.2 million tonnes a year of reprocessed metal, which is classified as waste, for its own steel industry. I am pleased to tell my right hon. Friend the Minister that 1.1 million tonnes of that furnace feed comes from the United Kingdom.

Is it any wonder that United Kingdom business men and politicians are sceptical about our European partners enforcing European regulations, when their own senior civil servants do not even seem to understand them?

Further afield, the Indonesian Government, failing to understand the ramifications of the waste lists, advised the European Union last month that they had imposed a ban on the importation of all waste. That meant that a large cargo of recovered ferrous metal classified as waste, which at that time was on the high seas bound for Jakarta, was therefore illegal and would not be accepted.

However, thanks to pressure from the United Kingdom —and, I suspect, from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade—the Indonesian Government realised the potential harm to their own steel industry and reversed their earlier decision. They, too, did not understand the regulations.

Now India and Turkey, which between them import nearly 1 million tonnes of furnace feed per year—the bulk of it from the United Kingdom—have announced that they will not import waste.

The House will be aware of the difficulties faced by the industry with regard to exports. Those of India and Turkey were further cases of not understanding the waste regulations.

There was also the case of the lorry from Swinnerton Brothers, a company based somewhere in the United Kingdom. It was carrying a load of secondary raw material from Britain across Belgium to Italy. The cargo was described as waste and stopped by Belgian customs officials, who delayed the load for 10 days, causing much frustration and expense for those involved. That was another case of the Belgians not understanding their own legislation.

In the past few weeks, the following countries have demonstrated that they do not understand the waste regulations: Indonesia, Turkey, India, Spain and Belgium.

What must be done is clear, and the United Kingdom Government can show some real leadership at the heart of Europe. Those responsible for the regulations must realise that the material we are talking about is not waste, but a valuable secondary resource, for which buyers are willing to pay large sums of money.

Mr. Fabricant: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marland: I appreciate my hon. Friend's support. The waste regulations must be changed.

Madam Speaker—I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker: if that is the worst error I make in my speech, I will be all right.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is flattery.

Mr. Marland: As we are in the business of quotes, thanks to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, Oscar Wilde said, "Flattery will get you anywhere."

To give credit where credit is due, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside have recognised the problem and are trying to help.

The impact of international legislation spills over onto the United Kingdom domestic scene and it is intended that United Kingdom recycling should be brought under the auspices of Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the United Kingdom waste management regulations.

The regulations and the licensing regime were due to apply to the metal recycling industry from 1 May, but, thanks to the interest shown by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, who took the time and trouble to look at the industry at first hand, he has recognised that metal processors should be licensed as metal recyclers and not as waste managers. In the light of

his first-hand experience, he has given the industry a further five months—until 1 October—to apply for exemption from the current waste management licensing regulations.

A further problem, however, is that the competent authorities in the United Kingdom for licensing and inspection, as well as for export purposes, are the 140 waste regulatory authorities. I believe that in describing material for export and interpreting the Government's regulatory guidance, there would be a standardisation problem, with 140 different authorities throughout the country. Furthermore, those authorities would have great difficulty in ascertaining whether the countries of destination had the appropriate and authorised facilities to receive processed metal cargoes described as waste.

I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that no one in the recycling industry fears appropriate regulation and licensing. On the contrary, that would be welcome, for there are still far too many unscrupulous operators, who do nobody any good, in the market.

We are talking about a high-tech industry which has invested millions of pounds in its plant and machinery. In all its different guises, it employs thousands of people and brings enormous wealth and massive environmental benefits to this country. That industry is in danger of being over-regulated and unnecessarily regulated, so it warmly welcomes the Government's determination to deregulate.

Today, too much well-intentioned national and international legislation is introduced as a result of activity by well-funded and determined single-issue politicians and pressure groups. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is to reply to the debate, to understand that recycled material for sale is not waste, but a valuable secondary raw material. In recognising that, and in redefining waste, they will release the stranglehold that regulation could exert on much of British industry and its export potential.

6.40 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) has done the debate, and the House, a service by raising the important issue of the recycling industry. The House is in his debt. From our constituency experience, we all know that that is indeed an urgent problem.

I should like to talk quietly to the Minister for Trade on six subjects—very succinctly on five of them. First, the right hon. Gentleman referred in his speech to Livingston. I used to represent part of Livingston—it is in the West Lothian area—and I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was rather hard on British Leyland. Honestly, it was not industrial relations that brought the Bathgate operation to an end, but the great difficulty of having a motor industry located away from the centres for the ancillary industries.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) knows, there were deep-seated problems and, at least over the past few years, the British Leyland management were in no way critical of the co-operation that they had received from the work force. Hon. Members who represent Birmingham and Coventry seats will know what the problems were. I owe a great deal to the late George Park, my colleague from Coventry, who used to give me much expert advice on the real problems of the parts of the motor industry that had moved out of the midlands. Perhaps the mistake was ever taking them out of the midlands in the first place.

Another question arises, and I want to address it to the Minister for Trade. Are we sure that we have the balance right between the money that the British state puts into attracting industries from the United States, Japan and elsewhere, and what we do to help our own industries? There is a great feeling that if only more money had been invested in, for instance, the North British Steel Foundry, that would have been far healthier than spending those huge sums on attracting industry from abroad.

I shall never forget visiting a famous Japanese company, accompanying a ministerial visit by the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) when he was Minister for Technology. I asked him, "How much grant are they getting?" and the right hon. Gentleman gave me the figure. It was confidential, but I was taken aback. The sums that our indigenous industries receive do not bear comparison with what goes to incoming industry from abroad.

Also on that issue, I give a gentle warning to the Minister for Trade that in areas such as mine people are most concerned about the effect of local government reform. He said that prosperity had come to the area represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and he was right; there is a good story to tell. But part of that story is the way in which Lothian region has been able to react quickly to packages suggested to it —for instance, by Motorola. I doubt whether smaller unitary authorities could have acted in that way, and even at this 59th minute of the 11th hour I tell the Government that they will get into terrible difficulty over local government reform in Scotland. I am not an English Member, but I understand that there may be problems in England as well, with all the orders that are now to be introduced. I really believe that the Government should think again.

My second main question concerns the quarrying industry. I shall start with two facts. To build the new Scottish Office building for the ancient monuments board and other branches of the Scottish Office at Longmore in Edinburgh, Ullapool marble is being used. But that has to go to Carrara to be processed and then come back to Edinburgh. For the new work at the Broomielaw in Glasgow, not Aberdeen granite but Brazilian granite is being used, and that has to be processed in Portugal.

We used to be a country with a thousand quarries, but now we have very few. Off the top of my head, I would say that in Scotland there are now six sandstone quarries, one marble quarry, one flagstone quarry—in Caithness—and no slate quarry. That may be a matter for import substitution, but we must ask how the Department of Trade and Industry can resolve a chicken-and-egg situation so as to rejuvenate the British quarrying industry.

That industry is all the more important because 50 per cent. and more of the building being undertaken by the construction industry is not new build but repair and renovation, so traditional materials are that much more important. Another reason for concentrating on traditional materials is that the people employed in quarrying are often over 40, and the Minister and I know that those are the most difficult people for whom to find alternative work.

I ask for some reflection on the state of the British quarrying industry, and especially to what extent snatch quarrying can be encouraged. That describes what happens

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

when a certain amount of stone is urgently needed for new buildings in the centre of cities, or for new public works such as the national museum of Scotland or the science museum in Exhibition road.

I can say quickly what I have to say on my third issue. The Minister and I served on a Standing Committee that dealt with the question of markets ouverts. In that connection, I must mention the export of art. In the light of what has happened at Floors, at Scone and at Abbotsford, the Scottish heritage is in peril. Those places attract hundreds of thousands of visitors, and artefacts have been stolen from them and quickly disposed of. I cannot expect an immediate answer, but I know that the Government are working on the problem. Markets ouverts are a real problem, and I hope that they will be able to do something about that.

The fourth issue, like the next two, concerns countries abroad. What is happening to our exports to Iran? Our political relations with Iran have been difficult enough, but they are becoming even more difficult because, for some reason or another, which has not been made clear to the House, we are asking for Iranian diplomats to be withdrawn from this country. That leads to a tit-for-tat situation. On the surface, the reasons seem trivial, but Iran used to be an important market and I ask the Department of Trade and Industry to ask the Foreign Office whether it has the right sense of proportion and whether it should be developing appalling relations with a country that is a good market.

My fifth point takes me next door to Iraq. This is not the occasion to parade my views on how we should react to sanctions against Iraq, but does the DTI realise the extent to which the French have gone back to Baghdad? Last May, in controversial circumstances, I stayed in the only major hotel in Baghdad, where it was almost impossible to get breakfast—I shall put it that way—for the want of people from Elf Aquitaine and other French companies, who said that they were not breaking sanctions, but preparing for the time when sanctions would be lifted. Dutiful as I am, I gave a full report to our embassy in Amman as soon as I crossed the border into Jordan. On the night of my return, the Foreign Secretary courteously saw me in his office and I made the same point.

Remembering that Iraq was one of our best markets —for instance, we undertook massive graduate training there—I believe that operating sanctions may present a problem. The DTI should reflect on what our competitors are doing in Iraq, which has the second biggest, if not the biggest, oil reserves in the world. I do not want to trespass on other matters and I realise that there are great difficulties following the Gulf war, but, at the very least, questions should be asked.

The sixth and final matter on which I wish to dwell involves Libya, again an awkward subject. The Minister and I have discussed the matter before. Libya, like Iraq, was a British Arab market and not an American market. The Americans had other markets, particularly in the Gulf and in Saudi Arabia. Britain's university and technical colleges have trained most of Libya's decision makers. I know that I was on unsafe ground when advancing my arguments on Iraq because difficulties were involved that were not germane to this debate. I feel very strongly, however, that there is a case for lifting sanctions against Libya until we have a far clearer idea of who perpetrated the Lockerbie crime.

A libel case has been successfully conducted in the courts by the Maltese against a Canadian company that asserted that there was a Maltese connection between the bomb and Pan Am flight 103. Once the Malta connection is challenged, as it is more and more by serious people, the case against the Libyan state falls to the ground.

In an Adjournment debate and in other debates, I have argued that the Libyans were not involved and that other people have made them the scapegoats for an appalling crime. I went to Lockerbie on day three. The police from my area were there to clear up. The Lockerbie crime was the most terrible crime against civilians in the western world since 1945. Before we operate sanctions, however, we have to be clear that the people against whom we are operating them are the people who perpetrated the crime. There is mounting evidence that we have got the wrong people.

I asked the Prime Minister to identify the lead Department in the matter. I suspect that it is probably the Crown Office in Edinburgh. It is high time that the DTI went to the Foreign Office, the Crown Office and the relevant sections of the Home Office and asked, "For how long are we going to go on denying ourselves access to the plums of the Libyan markets?"

We still have 5,000 British nationals working in Libya. There are huge demands because of its high-quality oil, which can finance huge projects such as the great man-made river, which those of us who visited it thought was an ecologically sound and major project. There will be huge developments there and British industry is missing out. It is my strong impression that the Italians are not missing out. I not only have an impression, but am certain that the South Koreans are having a field day and making a bomb. [*Laughter.*] Sorry, that was an unfortunate phrase. If I could erase something from *Hansard*, that would be it. They are making a pile. No, that is also unsatisfactory. They are making a fortune and British industry is missing out.

If the Minister thinks that I am exaggerating, let him talk to senior management at Babcock and Wilcox, who said only yesterday that it had major orders waiting and that, if sanctions were lifted, it could start those orders tomorrow.

I promised to be brief. I leave those thoughts with the Minister and I hope that he will reflect on them over the next month.

6.56 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I do not want my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade to reply to my comments. I wish merely to place them on the record and to ask for some discreet inquiries to be made of his officials. I want to discuss corruption in Russia and the extent to which it may pose dangers to British exporters.

The Russian market presents huge opportunities, but it may also present huge dangers. It appears that gangsters and mafiosi have almost totally penetrated Russian commerce and industry. There is, in effect, an alternative and more effective governmental system operating in Russia. It may be highly dangerous, therefore, when British and western European companies go into Russia to look for joint ventures. Russian gangsters may apply the

same methods to western European joint ventures that they do to Russian businesses. Those methods are well known. They involve blackmail, extortion, protection and the placing of henchmen in a company's management structures.

Perhaps most worrying of all, a new phenomenon seems to be appearing. Employees of joint ventures with foreign companies are being asked to accept middle managers and observers, who may go to the host country, usually western Germany, to go on a study mission and to learn what is happening in the exporting country. They may also be there, however, to spy out the land for the development of their particular form of exports—corruption, extortion, blackmail and other methods that I mentioned.

That fear has been expressed in some quarters. I ask only that Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, who have put in place the excellent structure about which we heard earlier, undertake internal studies of the extent to which their officials are picking up such signals and the extent to which British business men are being exposed to pressures that, initially and to a large extent, were placed on German business men, the most prevalent group of business men in Russia.

We take great pride in the fact that our business ethics and the way in which we do business are of the highest order compared with almost any other country. We do not want certain corrupt practices to wash back to the United Kingdom as a result of sincere, open and honest efforts to indulge in joint ventures in Russia or merely to export to Russia.

I leave those thoughts with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, who commented in opening on the way in which he and the President of the Board of Trade have organised exports. That is music to the business community, which has wanted something like this for a long time. The system that my right hon. Friends have delivered makes Britain a first division player in export activity and I congratulate them on it.

7 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I seem to be making a habit of following the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). When I last spoke, I followed his generous speech; today, he made a thought-provoking speech, following his extremely amusing point of order earlier in our proceedings.

I am delighted that the House has found time to debate one of the most crucial issues that faces Britain. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned Iraq, which I visited in helping British exports before the recent troubles. Will the Minister tell us what happened to the money owed under the Export Credits Guarantee Department's scheme to companies exporting at the time of the troubles? Does he think that British exporters are getting a fair share of the construction work in Kuwait?

By inventing things before anyone else and by making high-quality products for sale to the rest of the world, the British have traditionally enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world The industrial revolution began in the west midlands—with the invention of railways, for example—and that peaceful revolution continues to bring change across our planet.

In recent years, Britain has fallen behind—or, rather, other nations have caught up and some have overtaken us. The centre of invention has moved away to Europe, North America and, increasingly, Japan and the far east, and with that movement, the potential, through exports, for future wealth and prosperity in the United Kingdom has been threatened.

Our competitors will not easily give up their new-found wealth. They have succeeded by investing more than us in the future. Their Governments play a more active role than ours in co-ordinating, encouraging and, in many cases, providing financial pump priming for, exporters. Liberal Democrats and Conservatives understand that, in a free market, Governments should not attempt to run industry. But this Government fail to understand that even in a free market, Governments continue to have a vital role to play in helping industry to help itself.

The Minister gave examples of help that the Government are giving, but it is not enough. The President of the Board of Trade once promised to intervene before breakfast, lunch and dinner to help British industry, but we have seen precious little sign of his doing so. We have seen even less sign of the Government's investing in the future or of their having a vision or a strategy. Instead, they appear to be conducting a closing-down sale.

I should like the Minister to explain why a quarter of the people employed by the Foreign Office to help exporters have lost their jobs in the past 12 years. Has any research been conducted into the correlation between export success and Foreign Office assistance?

Our scientists and designers have a superb record of inventing things—there is nothing wrong with our innovation—but, too often in recent years, Britain has missed opportunities and has failed to generate wealth by exporting its inventions. As a result, we have a serious balance of payments deficit, including a deficit on manufactured goods. We must look again at making high-quality products for export on a large scale, so employing people who should be employed and paying taxes rather than sitting at home miserably twiddling their thumbs. Only with higher employment and higher-volume productivity will Britain afford a decent social programme, which probably all hon. Members want.

Our key industries, such as aerospace, must be nurtured. Companies such as British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce, Dowty TI, Westland and Smiths Industries bring in a net £2.5 billion to our balance of payments. Some people think that the black gold in the North sea—oil—has been wasted. Instead of giving unsustainable tax cuts to the rich, the Government should have used oil revenues to invest in the future and in Britain's infrastructure.

We have heard about the pharmaceutical industry and financial services today, but we run the danger of missing out on future opportunities in information technology, converging communications technology—made possible by fibre optics—environmental technology and biotechnology. These are key new areas in which high value-added jobs should be created in Britain. They offer huge opportunities for United Kingdom exporters. Other countries may have a lead, but it is not too late to do something to enable British companies to compete in world markets.

With margins squeezed in the European Union, many companies have looked further afield for business. The relaxation of the COCOM—the co-ordinating committee of western nations on technology transfer—restrictions has helped significantly to open up opportunities in central and eastern Europe.

[Mr. Nigel Jones]

What United Kingdom exporters need like a hole in the head is the reintroduction of national trade barriers; they need existing barriers to come down. They must be able, where possible, to buy components for their products from United Kingdom suppliers.

I shall give an example from an industry in which I spent more than 20 years—the computer industry. At this stage, I should declare an interest in ICL. Companies that manufacture information technology in the United Kingdom have global competitors. A company in the United Kingdom that assembles, for example, a box using a 486 processor will probably import its semi-conductors from the far east, but the European Union maintains high tariffs on semi-conductors, so a United Kingdom company that has made the box for export is at a price disadvantage in relation to its competitors in Japan or the Pacific rim countries, which need not pay that artificial tariff. A practical step that our Government could take would be to seek to persuade the EU to reduce or remove tariffs that harm our companies as they seek to compete in export markets around the world.

Another prime example of the United Kingdom's shooting itself in the foot is in relation to the new telecommunications technology and information super-highways. The commodity of the future is information. In the 1970s and 1980s, jobs that should have been kept in the United Kingdom and Europe migrated to low-cost Pacific rim countries; if, through inertia and misguided regulation, we allow North America and Japan to take an unassailable lead in the new communications technologies, the same fate will befall our knowledge-based industries in the 1990s. Those industries have the greatest potential for growth. Emerging information industries will simply locate where they find the best infrastructure and skills.

Potentially, the United Kingdom has an immense amount to offer in terms of technology, software skills —two out of five computer games are designed here— creativity and, crucial in a knowledge-based world, culture. We also have the English language, which is an enormous benefit to us. But it all needs to be joined together in an information super-highway. Current United Kingdom telecommunications policy, however, effectively excludes the two British flag carriers, BT and Mercury, from developing all but the most limited broad-band networks. It is a disaster. Perversely, it has resulted in cable television companies—largely United States-owned—being handed out a patchwork of technically different regional monopolies for an indefinite period to deliver broadcast television and telephony down the same pipe.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman must get the facts straight. He cannot say that he supports investment while attacking it; and he cannot say that he wants to promote super-highways throughout the country while attacking all the ways in which they are being promoted in terms of cable television companies. He must accept that nothing stops even the two major players to which he referred operating cable television companies. Indeed, BT has the licence for Westminster.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention. BT has said that it wishes to invest £15 billion of its own money in constructing an information super-highway, but it cannot do so if it is prevented from earning revenue from conveying television on such a network. Mercury backs BT on that. Sir Bryan Carlsberg, the Director General of Fair Trading, has warned of the dangers of new cable monopolies owned by overseas interests. BT and Mercury should be allowed to compete on level terms with those American companies to ensure the deployment of a broad-band, multi-media network throughout the United Kingdom.

Other countries are beginning to see the potential of the information revolution—for example, Vice-President Al Gore plans an information super-highway that reaches into every home and business in the United States. But the British Government are content to leave the infrastructure's installation—the cables under the pavements—to market forces. The result will be a second-rate system cobbled together by companies, most of which are not British, and the network will cover only the most densely populated areas of Britain. A map of the franchises that have already been granted shows that 80 per cent. of Britain is not covered.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): As the hon. Gentleman is concerned about broad-band highways, will he be kind enough to comment on SuperJanet and the work that has been done in that area?

Mr. Jones: I do not know much about SuperJanet, so I cannot comment on it. But I know that much of the system currently being installed is not even consist fibre optics, which were invented here. So those people who are now being inconvenienced by having their pavements dug up will have to have the job done again if we are to have a proper super-highway throughout Britain. Remote areas, including most of Wales and Scotland and parts of England such as the south-west, East Anglia and the north, will be locked out of new services that will provide not just entertainment and video on demand but distance learning, shopping from home, information exchange—perhaps with doctors, local councils and Government Departments —and even, in the future, local referendums.

The United Kingdom supply industry is already being damaged by the lack of a United Kingdom platform from which to export its skills. It is extremely ironic, for example, that the Germans are installing the latest telecommunications technology in the former east Germany with a state-of-the-art fibre network. The network that it is installing is based on United Kingdom thinking, as trialled and demonstrated by BT and United Kingdom manufacturers in a specially localised dispensation from the regulatory rules at Bishops Stortford. United Kingdom technology was proven and copied, yet the suppliers in east Germany are all German and American because United Kingdom companies are prevented from benefiting from a domestic market in the United Kingdom.

Let me refer briefly to some other industries. We must support British scientists and companies in new technological industries such as biotechnology and environmental technology. British companies complain that they cannot find adequate finance for biotechnology, yet it is a hugely expanding field which opens up exciting possibilities for the future. Research and development are being carried out in connection with disease and drought-resistant crops. Properly developed and deployed throughout the world, biotechnology would eradicate hunger and starvation from planet Earth for ever. I can think of no more laudable aim for mankind than to end

starvation. If Britain fails to develop solutions to that most pressing of all global problems, other countries will—and they, not we, will reap the benefits both financially and through greater influence throughout the world.

We are also missing out on environmental technology. We currently have 1 per cent. of the world market in environmental technology. Germany enjoys the world lead with 36 per cent. and the USA has 15 per cent. The market is expected to treble by the year 2000. As understanding grows about the seriousness of the threats posed by pollution, global warming and ozone layer depletion, every country will need technological solutions to save the planet's environment.

An example is the Coal Research Establishment. At Stoke Orchard in Gloucestershire, British scientists have developed a world lead in clean coal technology, yet the Government have shown little recent interest. I tabled questions asking what plans the Government have for the future of the CRE and received the reply that it was a matter for British Coal, not the Government. The Government are handing over to Japan, Sweden and others the market for fitting clean-up technology to the world's coal-fired power stations when Britain had established a technological lead that could and should create jobs and wealth for the future.

The phenomenon of Britain inventing something and other countries making money out of it has arisen occurred too often. It must not happen in the future. Many people call it "the hovercraft syndrome". We must have a vision for the future. We invest too little in education; we plan short term rather than long term; and we undervalue our scientists and inventors. Other countries with which Britain competes invest more in education. They are making breakthroughs and their companies are benefiting.

Another problem is language. In many new markets, particularly eastern Europe, the ability to speak the customer's language helps to win business. That is where the Foreign Office can help. It is important that schools start to teach languages as early as possible, certainly before the age of 11. In Sweden, where I have worked, children are bilingual by the age of 11 and go on to learn a third and sometimes a fourth language during the remainder of their school career.

We must invest more in education; plan for the longer term; encourage innovation; and have a strategy. We may then be able to turn the opportunities for United Kingdom exporters into real jobs and wealth for our people.

7.17 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Whenever the House debates trade, industry and exporting, I feel that there is a tinge of regret and that we are looking over our shoulder at our history. Centuries ago, we had organisations such as the East India Company. Later, we were in the forefront of the industrial revolution. We took the fruits of our inventions, and made ourselves the leading trading and exporting nation of the world.

But then the pendulum started to swing away. Although trade and industry did not exactly become dirty words, it was certainly not the career for the socially mobile. We heard apocryphal stories such as that of the teacher who took her charges round a factory and, as she loaded them into the coach afterwards, said, "And there you are. If you don't pass your exams, that's where you'll end up." It became a career that was moving down market.

In the 1960s and 1970s, we began to realise that our share in world trade was slipping away, and we faced determined and efficient foreign competition. So the Governments of the day, particularly the Labour Government, started to think that it was up to the state to reverse that trend and save the day. Nationalisation and state intervention became the norm, and politicians had the conceit to believe that they could run industries better at third hand than the people who had spent a lifetime in those activities.

Perhaps the classic example is the setting up of the National Enterprise Board, which put hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money into various ventures. It collapsed, and I do not know of a single example of its activities that returned a profit at the end of the day.

To be fair, in the 1980s, the pendulum swung violently the other way, and Government reacted dramatically by removing themselves from the industrial scene wherever possible. I strongly support the privatisation process. That has been essential in introducing a new vigour and a new strength into British industry. However, at the same time, industrialists found themselves with a lead Department, in the shape of the Trade and Industry Department, which was starting to operate at arm's length.

The Department became a transitory post for Secretaries of State. I defy most Members of the House to name the Secretaries of State who headed that Department between 1979 and 1991. The average stay was slightly more than a year and a half. At those times of abandonment of trade and industry, I called for tax allowances to compensate for that lack of Government interest, because Government help does not have to be in the shape of money and handouts, but should more properly be in the shape of co-operation and smoothing the way.

Today I believe that, with the present departmental approach, due to the direction and influence of the Ministers who are currently in that Department, industry does not need those blanket taxes. It does not need those allowances. Government should consider now only a selective approach for specific targets, such as the Japanese use for their machine tool industry.

That change is due to the Ministers. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade. I congratulate him on his recent appointment, which is well deserved. He has done a magnificent job in promoting Britain throughout the world. For that, this country owes him a debt of gratitude.

I do not feel the same sense of regret in the debate today, because, for the first time in all the years that I have been in the House, I have the feeling, contrary to what the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) said, that we are starting to achieve something that approaches a coherent plan—a plan that starts to tackle the subject of manufacturing and exports.

The recent White Paper on competitiveness is an important part of that overall strategy. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South-West (Mr. Butcher) said that that plan was music to his ears and I endorse that. After much work on its preparation, at long last we have a reasonably accurate appraisal of where we stand in the world vis-a-vis the competition. Anyone who operates in the real world might find it amazing that we have not carried out such an appraisal for decades. At long last, we have done it.

I am afraid that it is a characteristic of politicians that they think of the grand, sweeping design and forget all the

[Mr. Richard Page]

little nitty-gritty details. People who live in the real world know that the nitty-gritty details make the difference between profit and loss, success and failure.

As an illustration of the importance of the nitty-gritty details, I shall lift a story that was told by the President of the Board of Trade to a group of industrialists in Birmingham slightly more than a year ago. He told a story about a Japanese mission from a steel firm in Japan, which visited a similarly equipped British firm that was not making as much money.

When the Japanese left, they presented a list of 50 items that they suggested could be considered for introduction into that British plant. There were such items as, "When you test the metal quality, do you have to swing the glass door open wide? Why do you not simply open it enough to insert the sampling rod? When you take a sample, you take a nine-inch sample. Why cannot you simply take a couple of inches? That is all you need." The attention to the nitty-gritty will make the difference between success and failure.

It is tempting to quote whole sections of the competitiveness White Paper to illustrate what is being done to help exports. However, I sum it up by saying that there have been great, beneficial changes, which will help our exporters to export more, and that the DTI is to be congratulated.

I shall discuss one or two aspects and make a couple of observations. They will be predicated on the basis that if one does not show, one does not sell. The idea that we merely have to make a product and the world will beat a pathway to our door has long gone. I was, therefore, delighted to hear about the use of those private sector export promoters—last time I heard, it was 70; now I understand that it is 90—who will help to strengthen the promotion work in our 80 major markets.

I also feel that those private sector export promoters will achieve a couple of extra pluses. The first concerns additionality, which has been, in my view, inexplicably ignored by the Overseas Development Administration in the past in assessing overseas aid projects. I say, "inexplicably", because UK manufacturers have produced well-documented examples of how, having got an aid project, they have done further work and obtained further orders that have commercially stood on their own feet.

The second plus is that, although those private sector export promoters come from large companies and will be working with the Overseas Projects Board to target overseas ventures, the small business men—the small UK supplier and subcontractor—will be able to ride in on the back of that main contractor, and thus gain an opportunity to enter markets that they would not have been able to afford to enter if they had been left to themselves.

That leads me to my next argument, about the conspicuous failure by the majority of our trade associations effectively to serve their members in the manner of their overseas counterparts. Opposition Members have briefly mentioned that. I know that they are hard words, but in the tough international market of today, the time for niceties has long gone. Some trade associations provide effective liaison with Government and support for overseas activities, but they are in the minority. We must create a position in which those aims of effective Government liaison, of dissemination of information to the members and support for export activities are the norm and not the exception.

Lord Devlin, as long ago as the 1970s, carried out an appraisal of trade associations, and reached an opinion on three counts. First, he decided that a trade association that did not have an income of about £500,000 in today's terms could not effectively carry out its task. Secondly, he said that there should be one trade association per industrial sector. Thirdly, he said that industry would probably have to take the lead in rationalising a sprawling and often incoherent structure.

The position has not seriously changed since. There have been a few mergers. I pay tribute to what has happened in the chemical and electrical industries. They are progressive and encouraging examples. In far too many sectors, I regret to say, the reverse has occurred—there has been a proliferation of trade associations, bringing with them an inverse proportion of effectiveness in achieving the three aims that I mentioned.

In addressing myself to the reform of trade associations, I make an argument of sheer practicality. If Government are to listen effectively to industry, it is impossible for each of the DTI's industrial units and the Ministers involved to communicate and liaise with every trade association that operates in any specific sector. It is simply physically not possible, partly because there are not enough hours in the day.

Moreover, how do the Government—the Ministers, the departmental officials—know the coherent message issuing from that sector? They may visit and speak to 20 industrial trade associations and receive 20 different messages. If the Government, in the shape of the DTI, are listening, as they are now listening, it is essential that an amalgamation takes place or that umbrella organisations for each sector are set up, so that one coherent voice may speak.

The present position is not only unfair: it is inefficient and is damaging our national interest. The advantages of a coherent voice are obvious. I shall not explain how better liaison can be promoted, and overseas campaigns, trade fairs and projects can be helped. A greater role must be taken in promoting that industrial competitiveness, which must go wider than the usual provision of legal services, economic data and lobbying. If trade associations do not put their own houses in order, I appeal to trade association members to say that they want one coherent voice per sector.

At the beginning of my speech, I commented on the shape and form of Government help, and I shall give a specific example involving the nuclear review. I shall not rehearse the advantages of nuclear energy, except to say that it is cleaner, does not produce acid rain or CO_2 and is very safe—tempting as it would be to list all its advantages.

Government help can be given in a positive and effective way with a time-constrained report to reinforce the exports that already flow from nuclear-related companies. Two years ago, those exports were just £230 million; last year, they were £300 million. As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, there is a chance of our selling a nuclear power station to Taiwan.

Our safety features have great international attraction. The export potential for our nuclear industry is huge. There are about 427 plants throughout the world, and 50 plants under construction. As time goes by, each plant will want

to extend its life cycle. This country has the greatest experience in the world in extending the life cycles of nuclear plants, which will eventually be shut down and decommissioned. I shall not go into detail about the importance of encouraging British Nuclear Fuels. A long-drawn-out review will be damaging, especially to our nuclear exports.

At long last, we have a plan for manufacturing at a better quality and with better unit costs, so that we can export more. It suggests how we can draw together all the components of this country to compete. On that, the Department of Trade and Industry is to be congratulated.

7.32 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): The subject of today's debate is one of the most important, if not the most important, that we ever discuss in the House. It is nothing more or less than the question of how Britain is to earn its living in the world, not only for the rest of this decade, but well into the 21st century. It deals with how we are to generate the wealth with which to pay pensions, educate our children, finance the health service and provide all the other essential public and private services that we have come to expect in a modern, civilised country.

Gone are the days when we could export simple manufactured goods with ease. The competition from the newly industrialised world is too strong. Many of those countries are now capable of making the goods at least as well as, and much cheaper than, we can. I nevertheless pay tribute to those British companies that continue to survive in that market by sheer skill and determination.

Our future lies in exporting the high-technology goods and services at which we excel. There is one sphere in which excel over most other countries, and that is nuclear power generation. I wish to concentrate my remarks on that subject. I am surprised and pleased that the matter has already been mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), for all of whom I have much respect.

I have no nuclear power stations in my constituency, and I have no financial interest in the nuclear industry, but I believe that it is in the national interest that we release the export potential of our nuclear industry. There are companies in the nuclear industry in Britain that are at the leading edge of world technology.

Last year, I visited the site in Suffolk where Nuclear Electric is building the Sizewell B power station, which is nearly completed, and which will be Britain's first pressurised water reactor. I was impressed by the immense technical skill and knowledge of all the people engaged in the project and the world-beating quality of the project management team.

Nuclear Electric has built at Sizewell the world's safest and most technically advanced nuclear power station and it has been built to British safety standards, which are the highest in the world. Perhaps just as remarkable, it has been built well ahead of time and well within the budget. That remarkable achievement has not gone unnoticed around the world.

As the House has already been told, Nuclear Electric has been invited to tender for a nuclear power station in Taiwan, in co-operation with the American Westinghouse company. If successful, that will be good, not only for the growing trade relationship between this country and Taiwan—which I welcome in itself—but for manufacturing industry in Britain.

It will create 5,000 jobs for British engineers for at least five years and will be good news for Britain's hard-pressed engineering industry. It will generate export orders of about £700 million. It will also provide a shop window for the skill and expertise, not only of Nuclear Electric, but of the hundreds of British subcontractors and suppliers, and the professional consultants engaged.

Other possibilities exist; a technical agreement has already been signed with Korea—South Korea, I hasten to add. Many countries of the Pacific rim are interested. The annual growth in energy demand in that part of the world is, I understand, about 10 per cent. and many of those countries are looking to the nuclear industry to satisfy their future demand, not only because it is an effective way of generating electricity, but because they, like us, are conscious of the need to reduce the carbon dioxide and other noxious emissions that we are told are so damaging to the environment of our planet.

If we are to release the export potential of Britain's nuclear industry, we must do two things. First, we must grant companies the commercial freedom they need. Secondly, we must do our best to establish a solid home base and a viable home market to support the export efforts of that industry.

With regard to commercial freedom, Nuclear Electric, BNFL and Scottish Nuclear are nationalised industries and it was not easy for Nuclear Electric to reach the point where it could even bid for the Taiwan contract. Protracted negotiations had to take place with the politicians and civil servants who control the destiny of any nationalised industry, and that has added to Nuclear Electric's burdens and increased the disadvantages to which its commercial competitors from other countries have not been subject.

Such problems are inevitable with nationalised industries, because, in any commercial project, there will always be risk, and Governments have to underwrite the risks if the company involved is nationalised. As we all know, public resources are scarce and any Treasury, be it Conservative or Labour, would be reluctant to take those risks. To succeed in a highly competitive market such as nuclear technology, one must be able to offer speed and flexibility, not only in financing, but in the contractual terms that one is able to offer. That cannot be done by a nationalised industry. We must therefore set our nuclear industry companies free from the restrictions of nationalisation as soon as possible.

There will be difficulties, because, while in public ownership, the industry has accumulated large decommissioning obligations, but the difficulties are not insuperable and, if satisfactory arrangements can be made, a significant sum of money could be obtained from the sale of those companies—money which can then be used for hospitals, schools, roads and the like.

The family silver would still exist, working for us better than ever before; the industry would pay taxes on its earnings, employ British workers, efficiently generate electricity and earn foreign currency for Britain. We have seen how denationalisation has transformed British Airways, turning it, it is said, into the world's favourite airline—and it probably is. It is certainly much more efficient and profitable, and a better managed company,

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

than it ever was when nationalised. Much the same can be said of British Telecom, British Gas, British Steel and many others.

Let us be clear, however, that there will be no question of compromising safety standards. The Health and Safety Executive will still have the power to require compliance with the highest safety standards and the maintenance of a good safety record is also in the commercial interests of the company, because a plant that has to be closed on safety grounds generates no electricity and no revenue.

We must also create a firm home base, from which our nuclear industry can conduct its export activities. The economic benefits of nuclear generation will have to be debated some other day—they have often been debated in the House before. Suffice it to say that we lag behind France, Japan and the United States in our appreciation of the benefits of nuclear electricity.

I fear that there is a political, and sometimes an emotional, reluctance to accept the role that nuclear generation can play. That reluctance is much more evident among Opposition Members than among Conservatives, but it spills over into the thinking of Government and of our people and it puts our nuclear industry at a competitive disadvantage.

Nuclear Electric has already shown that it can build Sizewell B and there is no reason in principle why we should not decide without further delay that we wish it to build Sizewell C. That would enable us to put to work the engineers and project managers engaged on this massive project before their teams have to be dispersed. It would also create jobs for about 10,000 people.

The measures that I have outlined will enable the nuclear industry to plan with confidence for the future and to take its place as one of Britain's most important export earners.

7.43 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I am delighted that we are holding this important debate on exports. There has already been considerable export growth, due in no small measure to Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry, the Foreign Office and throughout the Government, and the missions that they have led abroad. Significantly, they take with them teams of leaders of British industry and of our great export sectors to foreign markets, prising open the doors and getting business for Britain. Export figures show what is being achieved, but much still needs to be done.

On his recent first visit to Brazil, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary took with him some leaders of business. I have heard from Brazil that the visit had a great impact there. Earlier, the Minister for Trade spoke with great enthusiasm about the work that he and his teams have done in India and other countries in south-east Asia.

I should like to stress the fact that we should look to Latin America, too, and open our eyes to the fact that the continent has returned to democracy, with the one sad exception of Cuba. It has also returned to free trade. We should note, for instance, that Latin American countries have unilaterally cut their tariffs. In 1985, when the process began, they charged an average 56 per cent. import tariff. By 1992, the last year for which I have figures, those tariffs had been cut to 16 per cent. That provides terrific opportunities which we must grab ahead of our competitors from France, Italy, Germany, Japan and the United States.

Hence, I welcome the Government's recent appointment of a director general of export promotion, Ray Mingay, and the establishment and bringing together of the export promotion divisions and the department known as XEA, which covers Latin America. Above all, I welcome the appointment of export promoters of high quality. They have come to us from the private sector, and they bring with them their expertise and dynamism. I know the ones appointed for Colombia and Brazil; I know of their experience and of what they have already achieved—it is most encouraging.

We should not forget that trade is a two-way process. That is why I particularly welcome the recent GATT agreement and the fact that, for the first time, it included agriculture. That is essential for the third world and invaluable for the countries of Latin America and Africa, because now, by their own efforts, they can earn foreign exchange and with it their self-respect.

If today we were discussing overseas aid—as we did yesterday—perhaps there would be a few more Labour Members on the Opposition Benches, whining about the fact that, as they see it, we do not give enough aid to the poor unfortunates over whom our hearts should bleed. I say that if we give them a chance to export their goods to us, they will not have to come here with their begging bowls; they will come here with their self-respect, having earned an income for themselves. That is why it is so desperately important that we ensure that the GATT agreement is properly implemented.

GATT has tended to concentrate on tariffs and the blocking of non-tariff barriers. What we need is transparency that will enable us to see the obstacles to international trade and then squeeze them out of existence.

I am uneasy about the fashionable new talk, especially in left-wing circles, about so-called social dumping, about which I questioned the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). It is supposed to describe the ruining of their environment by third world countries in their effort to manufacture products, and those countries' exploitation of their workers. That, at any rate, is the claim. I would certainly welcome an examination of the despoliation of the environment and the exploitation of workers in the context of goods imported from China, produced in massive slave labour camps in that communist republic. That indeed represents a humanitarian scandal, so let us deal with Chinese products first. Likewise, let us deal with the widespread instances of child slave labour in certain countries and sectors. We need to come down hard on them. It worries me that the idea of social dumping may be used to create new tariff barriers that will destroy the third world's competitive advantages.

A few months ago, we all saw on the television what was represented as the Colombian coal industry—children wheeling barrows along rickety wooden planks. We were told that the coal produced in this way in Colombia competes with coal from our own mines. Not true. Colombian coal is produced from vast seams, stretching out in straight lines for 4 km. Massive machinery is brought in to strip out the coal seams, and the coal is carried on conveyor belts to bulk carriers. That is why the Colombian coal industry, for instance, is competitive against our own coal. It is not because they have children running around with little, rickety, wooden wheelbarrows

or because of the exploitation of children. That industry is providing for Colombia a source of massive foreign exchange, which gives it a chance to turn away from the ghastly drug trade which has plagued it and brought to it death and misery.

Another example is the cellulose or softwood industry of Brazil. We hear allegations of massive destruction of the tropical rain forests. Let us understand that the overwhelming bulk of the softwood produced in Brazil comes from the south of Brazil in the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina. In those states, they have been producing softwoods for years and years. Indeed, they clear entire forests, but they had planted those forests in the first place and they replant them because they are good at the husbandry of the forests. They produce the softwood and the pulp, cellulose, which we in Britain need to import.

Of course, such states have a worrying competitive advantage because if one plants vast plantations of softwood in Scandinavia, for instance, it takes 25 years for a tree to reach maturity. However, if one plants that tree in the fertile and appropriate areas of the third world, such as those areas of Brazil to which I referred, for instance, they will be fully grown for cropping in five years. It is obvious that such areas will have a competitive price advantage, but let us not allow the people who support barriers to trade to come up with a load of twaddle that, somehow, those countries are despoiling the environment or using child slave labour and, therefore, we should have non-tariff barriers against them. Brazil and other countries that are alleged to be in the third world and which are involved in such production have addressed those important points so that they can achieve continuity of production. There are many other cases of claims of child slave labour, such as in the textiles industry.

Third world countries have difficulty when they go to the Geneva offices. Along comes the European Commission, which in so many instances is an organisation in support of barriers to trade, with vast legal teams of experts. They charge into Geneva and easily out-manoeuvre the negotiators and the defenders of trade from the third world countries, who cannot compete with the legal and technical expertise which is brought to bear in such forums. Those teams scour their export competitors in the third world for evidence of social malpractices, they artfully argue them from the specific to the general and then they create massive tariff barriers.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, made an outstanding speech in which he stressed the importance of trade for the third world and how valuable it is to create conditions in which the third world can earn its living, rather than relying, demeaningly, on the begging bowl to be filled by the countries of Europe and north America.

It is a valuable debate and it is significant that, at 7.53 pm, Conservative Member after Conservative Member of Parliament is wishing to put the case, not only for Britain's trade, but for the world's trade. I only feel sorry for, I would say, our hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough —I say that with good heart—who, for much of the debate, has been the sole Labour Member present. I note that he has been joined, somewhat belatedly, by a colleague.

Mrs. Gillan: An odd colleague.

Mr. Arnold: His hon. Friend is the Whip on duty. Perhaps he is an odd colleague, but I must be careful since our own Whip is also present.

Export success leads to jobs and to improving standards of living. That is why I back so strongly the work of my right hon. and hon. Friends the Ministers in their work in developing British exports.

7.53 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): It is a great privilege to take part in the debate. It is quite a hard act to follow some of the hon. Members who have spoken. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) spoke about the recycling of material, especially iron, which is not to be referred to as waste. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) talked about nuclear energy and boasts—perhaps he does not know this—in Shoreham the prototype power station for the power station subsequently built in Battersea. Also, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) spoke so eloquently about south America. Of course, he was born and brought up in Brazil.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Not born in Brazil.

Mr. Fabricant: Not born there, but brought up there, nevertheless. I believe that he speaks fluent Brazilian Spanish.

Mr. Arnold: Portuguese.

Mr. Fabricant: Brazilian Portuguese. Such ignorance! Having heard from my right hon. Friend the Minister that the Labour party has few credentials on which to speak about the subject, I was going to set out—and I shall set out —my own credentials.

Some years ago, when I started off in business, I founded a company which subsequently set up radio stations in some 50 countries worldwide; one of those countries that purchased equipment from me was Brazil, so I hasten to add that it was a slip of the tongue when I said Spanish instead of Portuguese.

I was involved with manufacturing in Cornwall and the pre-installation of equipment in Sussex. In my last few years with the company, I was deputy chairman with special responsibility for overseas sales. As I said, we established radio station equipment in more than 50 countries worldwide, from Radio 4 and Capital Radio in London to radio stations as far afield as Rikisutvarpid in Iceland, Radio Botswana in Gabarone and Radio Moscow. They all have radio stations which I helped to set up.

It frustrates me when I visit exciting British companies that have not considered exporting their products and services. I must confess that I visited a firm in Lichfield last Friday that manufactures—I will not name the company —and designs computer control equipment for use in brewing and in the pharmaceutical industry.

Mrs. Gillan: Name it.

Mr. Fabricant: I will not name the company, as my hon. Friend urges me to do, because it would embarrass the management of that company. I was impressed with their technology, but I was equally disappointed that they had made no attempt to export any of it.

[Mr. Fabricant]

When I was in the United States, both as a doctoral student and later as a salesman for Britain, I was impressed by a comment of Woodrow Wilson, although he made it in 1912, some years before I was there:

"Business underlies everything in our national life, including our spiritual life."

Wilson's comments are as true today as they were when he said them. As a small island, we clearly cannot afford not to focus on sales abroad. For the past four elections, the British people have chosen a Government who recognise and value wealth creation through the success of British business.

My purpose today is twofold. First, it is important that we acknowledge our success over the past 15 years in boosting our exports, and pull apart the myths and fallacies expounded by those who oppose simply for the sake of opposition. Secondly, I wish to focus on ways in which we can increase our exports still further, especially by opening up a new frontier in Russia and eastern Europe. We must not allow the Germans to make all the running.

I well recall taking part in a trade and industry debate at a Conservative party conference in Brighton some five or six years ago, and saying to a highly sceptical audience that cracks were appearing in the Soviet empire and that I could foresee a time when a Russia, unbridled by socialism, might even join the European Economic Community, as it was then known. Oh, happy days.

It is so important to remember all the tremendous export achievements of British industry over the past few years. Who would have thought that we would become a net exporter of television sets? Who would have thought 15 years ago that we would rise to the top of the G7 league table for manufacturing productivity? Who would have foreseen that, since the early 1980s, our manufacturing exports would increase by more than two thirds and that output would rise by 30 per cent. over the past 10 years? Who would have believed, given the years of ruin by Labour in the seventies—the years of Red Robbo, of lame duck, bankrupt and strike-ridden motor manufacturers—that we are on course to become a net exporter of cars by the mid-1990s? That is all despite the fact that the Labour party still tacitly supports the rail strike, which damages not only commuters, but our exports. We must not forget that it affects freight transportation, too.

Who on earth would have considered, even in his wildest dreams, that we would be so successful in exporting our political policies? From Angola to New Zealand, Governments are following the example of sound Conservative policies such as privatisation, deregulation, lower taxes and value for money. Despite its jealousy of the purity of its own language, I have even seen the headline in *Le Figaro*: "Le Privatisation." Even that favourite social democratic golden calf, Sweden, has seen the light at last and is adopting the British approach, the Conservative approach. What a remarkable contrast with the Opposition's policies.

The Liberal Democrats' only big policy export is proportional misrepresentation, which overseas Governments are trying to cast off even quicker than the president of the Liberal Democrats can run to a betting shop. As for Labour, what can we say? Just when we thought it was safe to go back in the sea, Beckett's "Jaws" returns. In the scramble for the top of the greasy Labour pole, we know that the leadership contenders want to export only that old British disease—industrial strife, union rule, subsidies and taxpayers' money down the plughole.

I want to return to a more important matter—the success of British industry. Over the past few years, the efforts of the Board of Trade have been instrumental in securing British success overseas. I well recall, only a few years ago, being in Kampala and witnessing the machinations of French, German and Japanese exporters. Hand in glove with their own Governments, they were able to bend GATT rules and offer loans on capital projects on far more preferable terms than those available from the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) alluded to that earlier today. Even if a contract could be secured, German firms enjoyed advantageous terms from HERMES, while our own ECGD provided inadequate cover for British exporters. That has changed. Since the last Budget, the President of the Board of Trade has ensured that British firms can compete on an equal footing with France, Germany and Japan.

The DTI campaign to help businesses make more of the single market provides vital information and practical advice—I received some before I was elected to the House—to British companies striving to take up the opportunities that the single market offers. Given that so many member countries of the EU flout single market rules—the French subsidies for Air France and Italy's aid for its steel industry being prime examples—the establishment of the single market compliance unit is an excellent and necessary step.

Too often, EC countries, in their zeal for federalism and the social chapter, seem to forget that single market rules are to be obeyed. We can no longer tolerate a Community in which many members shriek, "Do as I say, don't do as I do."

The Government deserve credit for preventing further EC steel restructuring grants for a number of European companies. I have the privilege of serving on European Standing Committee B, which has been considering that very problem. Other measures have also been beneficial, such as the overseas visits of Ministers. We heard earlier of the activities of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade. His visits with key business men are an excellent step forward and will do much to promote good will.

No longer must British business men be subjected, as I have been, to namby-pamby diplomats in our high commissions and embassies overseas, unwilling to get their hands dirty by discussing trade. There is a new ethos. More than 80—perhaps 90, as we heard today—business men have been seconded to the DTI to provide expert advice, and there is a growing cross-fertilisation between the DTI and the Foreign Office. As with the first Elizabethan era, our diplomatic stations overseas are now more aware than ever that their role is to promote trade first and practise diplomacy second—and about time, too.

I want to discuss how we can boost our exports still further. So far, I have concentrated on the success of our British exports. We should be proud that Marks and Spencer shirts are worn all over the world and that Cadbury-Schweppes is a global household name. Are hon. Members aware that Marks and Spencer is building a second store in Paris because demand has outstripped its first? Are hon. Members aware that it is not just good value clothing that Parisiennes seek? The quality and freshness of the food available at Marks and Spencer outstrip that

available from comparable French stores. So let them not mock the English cuisine. There are also things we should not do.

We should not fall into the trap of comparing ourselves with Japan and Germany and demand subsidies, as the Opposition always do. The Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry had a smaller budget in 1990 than the pro rata budget of the DTI. Most of German industry is no longer subsidised, either. Our research and development programmes are first-class, and it is no wonder that the pharmaceutical industry had a trade surplus of £1.3 billion in 1993—a great success story. Nor must we forget the trade surplus of £4.2 billion that the chemical industry earned, or the fact that 70 per cent. of the turnover from the aerospace industry is exported.

We should not allow industrial taxation to climb. We now have a favourable climate for industry that must not be allowed to slip. Taxes and other costs on businesses must be reduced at every opportunity. Of course, wage costs must be kept to a minimum.

We should not allow the pound to be chained to any artificial mechanism. Every time the pound has been allowed to float freely, most notably between 1933 and 1938, and between 1981 and 1989, industry prospered. In all other periods, industry suffered. As the late Lord Ridley stated in his memoirs:

"During all these periods, the pound was managed in some way or another—the Gold Standard, the Bretton Woods agreement, and later shadowing the deutschmark and finally the exchange rate mechanism. All these devices were designed to keep the pound higher than the market would otherwise have it. As a result, our companies' ability to sell profitably was markedly reduced."

As a great Baroness once said, "You can't buck the market." We should all be aware of that.

An over-valued pound gives the opportunity for high-cost economies such as Japan and Germany to import a huge quantity of goods into Britain and to weaken our industry by eating into our markets. Benjamin Franklin said:

"No nation was ever ruined by trade."

We should take that into account when we consider how to boost our exports.

Quite rightly, the Government focus on the European Community and the Pacific, but I believe that the next great frontier for British trade must be Russia and its neighbouring states. Russia alone has a market of 150 million people, many of whom are highly educated. In our quest to open up markets in Japan, we must not neglect the markets in eastern Europe, in central Asia, in the Caucasus and in the Russian Federation. Why should we allow Germany to use her proximity to the Czech Republic and Hungary to make all the running and turn those countries into its own economic fiefdoms?

British Petroleum has made significant inroads into Azerbaijan. We need to encourage our motor manufacturers, our pharmaceutical companies and our service industries to look at trade in eastern Europe and Asia. Encouragement of joint ventures with Russian or eastern European firms is one way of getting a foothold, but we can also support other, less obvious activities to encourage overseas trade. We must make sure that the single market works for not only us but the countries of eastern Europe that are struggling to free their economies from years of socialist central planning.

Franco Racca, executive director of LICA Development Capital Ltd, and a former strategic adviser to Fiat, made a good point when he said:

"It is in the West's interests to help Russia . . . the preferred approach must involve barter, and most projects must find western joint ventures and managers. Rather than western Government and agencies lending money, they should underwrite private sector joint ventures and set the industrial priorities, by sector and region. The West must realise that the Common Market goes all the way to the Urals as an essential fact; it is that barter replaces currency in Russia as the principal medium of exchange".

We could supply Russia with food, manufacturing machinery, management and distribution systems in return for minerals—which Russia has in abundance—oil, diamonds, gold and titanium.

We have a model for that barter approach. The largest ever export order was the Al-Yamamah project in Saudi Arabia, headed by British Aerospace. In return for the Saudis supplying 500,000 barrels of oil a day, with some money as well, BAe supplies Tornados, Hawks, ground facilities and training, as well as minefield clearers from Vosper Thorneycroft. Britain could gain from increased trade and increased military security.

Back in Azerbaijan, British Petroleum is involved in a joint venture with the British Council for Management and with English-language training of personnel. The British Council is targeting the East Asia and Pacific region and Latin America for special attention, and the council is active in 108 countries worldwide.

Germany spends three and a half times as much as Britain, and France spends seven times as much on their cultural equivalents. That is not altruism. In my experience, buyers who have been culturally exposed to Britain like what they see and their purchasing decisions nearly always reflect that.

It would be a false economy to cut back on the British Council, just as it would be a false economy to cut back on the BBC World Service or on the number of our embassies.

The prospects for British exports have never been brighter. We are moving back towards the realities of the first Elizabethan era, when we made use of every trading opportunity. GATT—as noted in a recent debate—will increase our trading opportunities still further.

I have no doubt that eventually, and with a glorious inevitability, GATT will establish a global free market, so that we do not have to be dependent on Europe alone and will have the chance to embrace other trading blocs. Provided that the Government continue on their present path, provided that the European Community looks outward not inward, provided that we maintain our hard-won opt-outs from a single currency and the crippling social chapter, and provided that British industry continues to offer value for money, the scope for British business and economic success of the nation is unlimited.

The high wage-cost, interventionist and regressive trade union policies of the Labour party would spell disaster, resulting in just one export—the brain drain of talent that we experienced in the 1970s—and economic ruin. We cannot allow that to happen.

8.13 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): It is always a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). I am sure that we all agree that he is a salesman not just for his

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constituency but, as he said, for Britain. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on securing this debate.

On examining *Hansard*, I discovered that we last debated this subject on 21 May 1993. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) complained that he did not have the support of the four civil servants in the Box, now down to three. I felt sad for the hon. Gentleman during this debate because he has not even been supported by four of his party colleagues. The debate on 21 May 1993 proved a similar occasion. Then, only one Front Bencher spoke for the main Opposition party, and no Back Benchers spoke.

It is difficult to take Labour seriously when it cannot muster support on a debate on a subject that is so important for British industry and the wealth and health of our nation. In fact, I could not find on the parliamentary on-line information service a single supply day on which exports were chosen by Labour as the subject for debate. That is a bad record, and I hope that people outside the House will take note of it.

Earlier, I referred to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough as a friend, and I would not withdraw that remark. He spent most of his speech defending the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). It was phrased in such a way as to suggest that there will be no contest and that the hon. Member for Sedgefield is already the leader of the Labour party. Again, many people in the House and outside it will note that assumption.

I tried to intervene on the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister to pick up on his remarks about exporting education. I should like to draw attention to the only independent and excellent university of Buckingham in my county, which recently won the Queen's award for exports. That first-class establishment offers special, different and excellent education, and I thought that I should mark its contribution in this debate on exports.

Over the past two years, I have visited several companies in my constituency that make a great contribution to British exports. Blease Medical exports anaesthetic delivery equipment. That excellent company produces reliable equipment that is used throughout the world, and particularly in third world countries because of its reliability. Securon Ltd. in Winchmore Hill produces seat belts. In this country, direct demand for seat belts is low because they are installed as part of the car's manufacturing process. The seat belts that Securon manufacture are installed in many cars in foreign countries that were manufactured before seat belts as original equipment were a matter of course.

Boughton Engineering produces a wide range of engineering equipment and has a successful record of trading abroad. The last time that I visited Boughton, it was preparing certain vehicles for use in Bosnia by the United Nations and our armed forces. Finally, to link with remarks made by my hon. Friends the Members for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) and for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) about the nuclear industry, it would be remiss of me to contribute to a debate on exports without mentioning Amersham International, which is a success in terms of both our privatisation policies and exporting.

The other nuclear company that I visited recently was AEA Technology. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) is in his place on the Front Bench. Yesterday, he was good enough to answer my question on when a statement would be made about the privatisation of AEA Technology, to set it free. He replied that

"we hope to be able to make an announcement . . . shortly."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 222.]

It is worth repeating that the strides being made by that company in terms of environmental science, neural networks and environmental safety mean that it is ready to be set free. I hope that he hears my remark that the sooner it is set free, the better.

We are the fifth largest exporter in the world, and I believe that, at last, the Government seem to be getting their act together with a policy on trade and industry which is benefiting our industry. Coupled with the excellent work now being done by the Office of Science and Technology, particularly on research and development, our businesses are beginning to find that the Government can create the environment in which they can be allowed to build their share of the world market.

With what I can only describe as renewed commercial aggression, set against a background of low interest rates and lean production, British business is in a position to compete against the Americas and the Pacific rim countries.

No debate on exports could take place without reference to the White Paper on competitiveness, which was issued recently by the President of the Board of Trade. Competitiveness is at the heart of ensuring our industrial success. I particularly welcome the emphasis that my right hon. Friend has placed on the dialogue with industry. That affects not only our present position but future policies, which will now be properly influenced by the wealth creators who run our industrial concerns.

I do not believe that anyone would disagree that the Tory Government had a great deal to do in the early 1980s. They had to move from subsidising inefficient nationalised industries to creating efficient, contributing organisations. They also had to reduce the unreasonable influence of the unions. We had a reminder of such influence—it has been spoken about at length in the Chamber today—by the RMT strike. Yesterday's strike shows that eternal vigilance is still necessary from Conservative Members. I must mention that, during that strike, the Chiltern line, which serves my constituency of Chesham and Amersham, kept on running. It took three signalmen and the millions of pounds that we invested in that signalling system. My constituents were extremely pleased that they could get to work.

It is difficult to understand how my colleagues on the Opposition Benches can talk about the success of our businesses at home and abroad while supporting industrial action that sends appalling messages to foreign investors and buyers alike that the unions still have a grip and a force, which is ultimately damaging to trade and business. Success in world markets and strikes do not go together.

London is undoubtedly the leading financial city in Europe and, together with centres in different time zones such as New York and Tokyo, it stands out as one of the commercial centres of the world. It is vital that its infrastructure and facilities reflect its position. Therefore, it was with great sorrow that I attended the meeting to announce the failure of the Crossrail Bill at Committee stage. That project is of great significance not only to my constituency but to the business and financial community,

which is, after all, responsible for one of the largest contributors to our wealth through the invisibles sector of our economy.

The Opposition always pay lip service to the need to get people out of cars and on the railways, but the two Opposition Members who served on that Committee voted down the crossrail project. I believe that that decision will greatly hinder the City's development. I urge my hon. Friends on the Front Benches to continue to seek a way in which that project can be revived, as it would provide the necessary infrastructure for the success of our City in the next century.

I am a consultant to the Chartered Institute of Marketing and I am proud to speak for it in the House. While I declare my interest, I must also declare my disappointment with the White Paper, because it made so little direct reference to marketing per se. The fortunes of some of our most successful exporters are based on marketing. Yes, their products were high-quality ones, but those products were refined chiefly from the sales and marketing forces, which identified customers' needs and the way in which to satisfy them profitably. Two great weaknesses of the past are still apparent today—lack of middle management training and lack of education in marketing.

I make no apology for emphasising the importance of marketing training in a debate on exports and highlighting the wide choice of course and education available through the Chartered Institute of Marketing. This is a commercial, because the institute's facilities at Moor Hall are excellent. It tailors its courses to suit busy managers who may only be able to take a limited time off from their employment to further their knowledge. Yes, this is a commercial because I am a marketing person, but so are our competitors.

Last year, while I was in Taiwan, it did not surprise me to learn of the emphasis that businesses and business leaders placed on marketing. The head of the trade centre in Taipei took a great deal of trouble to explain to me the efforts and expenditure that were being put into marketing training.

I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will register this small protest at the apparent exclusion of specific reference to marketing in the White Paper. Now that measurements of marketing effectiveness are becoming more widespread, I hope that the DTI will join me and those business men who already have a greater appreciation of the role and value of this discipline to our industries. Understanding a product or a service is not enough; one must also understand marketing and marketing techniques to exploit that product or service.

One of the things that the DTI seems to have lacked for many years is continuity. In common with many of my hon. Friends, I congratulate the President of the Board of Trade and his colleagues at the DTI on the progress that they have made with an impressive team. If it is not too late, I should like to put in a plea for relatively minor, if any, changes at the DTI. Whatever the motives that may be attached to the media reports about my right hon. Friend's own career preferences, I believe that the exporting community fully endorses the view that there have been too many ministerial changes at the Department since 1979. I believe that the trade team should stay where it is.

There has been a transformation in the Government's input to the trade scene and they have been extremely receptive to the views of exporters. The Government have been keen to find solutions and imaginative in the way that they have collected information and set about resolving key issues. We now have a situation in which for the most important markets for British exporters, the Export Credits Guarantee Department's premiums are at a realistic and competitive level. I realise that the ECGD premiums may be out of line with the competition in some markets, but they cannot all be tackled at once.

Perhaps the most challenging issue that presents itself to the ECGD is how to address cover for privatised projects. The central features of such a project, as opposed to a conventional one, is that the project is looked at by the underwriter in the ECGD on its own merits and viability and the returns that it will generate, and not on the basis of a guarantee from an overseas Government. Such projects are off a Government's balance sheet and the ECGD and Ministers should consider those projects with substantive private sector input.

The American export credit agency, Exim, has hired three outside specialists to cover such underwriting, which is different from current underwriting. Coface, the French agency, has also hired a specialist for between the next six to 12 months. Even if it is a costly exercise, I believe that it would be a worthwhile investment. We would be able to look in depth at the ways in which the ECGD should respond to the underwriting needs of such privatised projects.

I am grateful for advice and information from Banque Paribas in London, which is supporting the activities of many British companies in their exporting endeavours. More importantly, it has given me up-to-date information on the success of travelling with a British Minister in a trade delegation which, it said brings the market into sharp focus. Journalists writing about the Minister in *Export Today* said:

"when accompanying with him one should not expect a holiday. It is hard work all the way even when it is social. However, one can expect to bring back the orders and that is what the Minister's travels have been about."

We should congratulate my right hon. Friend on his initiative in visiting the far east no fewer than 10 times in the past 18 months. As Latin America is his next target, I fully expect further good results from his travels there. I believe that he is visiting Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, and we wish him and our businesses good fortune.

I do not wish to refer just to the Minister leading the trade delegations. I want to say a word of praise about DTI officials who staff some of our embassies and consulates. Businesses in my constituency have noticed a marked improvement in the services being provided from our embassies, not by Foreign Office officials but by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry.

One of our most successful exports—indeed, our leading export—in recent years has been privatisation, which has been touched upon in a different context. British companies such as Ernst and Young are selling their experience abroad following successfully advising on the privatisation of British Telecom, Jaguar, Royal Ordnance, British Gas and many others. That expertise is opening up the economies of central and eastern Europe to home and overseas investors. As has been said, extensive knowledge and experience of the former Soviet Union are needed, but when coupled with privatisation expertise, the combination is bringing home contracts from virtually all the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Ernst and Young is just one of a series of companies involved in the exporting of Conservative privatisation principles. It has successfully advised on the first offers for

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sale in Poland and Romania and has pioneered mass privatisation in the Czech and Slovak republics and in St Petersburg in Russia. More and more Governments and more and more countries are adopting privatisation programmes. For example, such programmes are beginning in Argentina, Hungary, Latvia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and, nearer to home, Denmark.

There has been a sea change in the Department of Trade and Industry and in the services that the Department is providing to British business to help it export successfully. It is up to Government to create the framework and it is up to our businesses to go out there and sell the goods.

We have an excellent Minister leading the team. I should like to end by quoting from *Export Today*, an excellent magazine, which said, in article written by Carol Debell:

"There's nothing random about where he goes or when he goes. It is part, he says, of a carefully planned strategy to use his Ministerial clout where it can make most impact."

I am proud to be on the Benches of a Government who use their ministerial clout to make our exporting businesses more successful.

8.33 pm

Mr. Bell: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). It is my first opportunity to follow her in a debate. I appreciated her remarks and her knowledge and lucidity in the various subjects she covered. We have heard a number of quotations. Oscar Wilde was mentioned by the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland). I managed to mention Benjamin Disraeli and Winston Churchill and the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) got Benjamin Franklin in on the act. Years ago, Lloyd George used to say that one can make a good name for oneself in Friday speeches; the tradition has now moved to Thursday evening.

We have heard some quite good speeches. I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) on nuclear energy. I shall read it with interest tomorrow. After the effervescence and turbulence of the opening speeches, it has been a good and constructive debate. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire pleased me enormously, not that he got "privatisation" right, but he got the gender right. It is masculine, not feminine.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham referred to various privatisations throughout the world. Her mention of Hungary reminded me of a little joke I heard in Hungary recently. They are saying, "What has capitalism done that 40 years of communism could not do?" The answer is to make socialism popular. There may be lessons in all this for us.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham referred to competitiveness; indeed, she made more references to it than the Minister, but no doubt the Under-Secretary's homologue in closing will rectify that. She referred also to the rail strike. It is a little desperate of the Government to blame a future Labour Government for the rail strike and to come back to it time and again.

The Minister showed his disregard—or should I say "contempt"—for European networks, whether they be rail or road. He dismissed them out of hand and said that all that would happen would be that taxpayers' money would be used to build such networks. In fact, the money comes from the European investment bank and, if Mr. Delors has his way, from a new European bond. So the British taxpayer will not have to pay for the European networks when they get going.

The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West referred to recycling. I shall not go down that road. I found his remarks interesting, but not in my particular bailiwick. He took me up on the lack of formulation of Labour party policy. He will be happy to know that at 8.36 pm, with a good hour before me, I am able to deal with more Labour party policy than I could earlier.

The Minister made great play of comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), touching upon output and productivity. The Minister referred to our document, "Winning for Britain". He made great play of the fact that we had not covered Northern Ireland. Of course, it is part of the United Kingdom and we have a separate document to cover that. It is a fact—and it is in the document—that, until 1980, investment in manufacturing never fell below 3 per cent. of GDP. Since 1980, it has always been below 3 per cent. and is now barely over 2 per cent. Even in the best year of the 1980s, manufacturing investment was still below the percentage of GDP invested in the worst year of the 1970s or 1960s.

Mr. Stephen: Is not there a problem of definition in seeking to draw a distinction between manufacturing and services? For example, in the computer industry, we might say that manufacturing is making the hardware. But is making the software manufacturing as well? Sometimes the software is of higher value than the hardware.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. We make that point in our document. The Minister touched on the fact that software can be involved in both services and manufacturing. The point that we were trying to make in our document, which was dismissed by the Minister, is that the distinction between services and manufacturing should no longer exist. We have a way of creating wealth in our country. If it comes from services, so be it and if it comes from manufacturing, so be it. The two are not, as we lawyers say, mutually exclusive.

Our document says that manufacturing output in Britain is barely above its 1979 level. I referred to the Minister's speech and his two so-called revolutions, which we call recessions. In the recent recession, more than 80,000 companies went into liquidation. The fact to remember is that that is a permanent loss to our economy. One of the most valuable contributions that the Government can make to sustained industrial recovery is to maintain policies of macro-economic management which promote sustainable demand growth with low inflation. I tried to point out earlier that the Government's policies would not lead us to sustained growth or low inflation.

Britain now invests less of its GDP in manufacturing than all bar two of the 24 nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire made several references to the OECD, but did not cite that fact. Under the Conservatives, the proportion of profits taken out of business in dividends has increased from about half of net profit to almost three quarters, a fact which concerns the Financial Secretary to the Treasury as well as my colleagues. British companies now invest in their business

about half the proportion of profits retained by their German and Japanese competitors. We believe that the loss in price competitiveness against nations with newer machine tools, better-designed factories and more advanced transport and communications systems will inevitably mean that, in the long run, there will be a failure to invest in innovation.

In reply to the Minister's earlier statement, I have to say that the first objective of any serious industrial strategy must be to raise the proportion of the economy invested in industry. Why has not the success of Britain's financial sector been expressed in better performance in industrial investment? I am trying to put on the record some of our refutations of the Minister's arguments.

Britain has accumulated the world's second largest portfolio of overseas equity while running the second poorest level of investment in manufacturing among OECD countries. With reference to the European network, which I mentioned earlier, an important part of competitiveness is the provision of an efficient transport system that eliminates delay in the movement of goods and provides reliable travel for the work force, a point touched on by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham.

It is remarkable that, during the 1980s, the Government said that manufacturing and the balance of payments did not really matter. In an earlier debate on this topic, the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) took me to task, but I was able to refer him to a number of statements made by Ministers in the 1980s. The Select Committee on Overseas Trade in another place produced a famous report in 1985. It made it clear that, unless

"the climate is changed so that steps could be taken to enlarge the manufacturing base, combat import penetration and stimulate exports of manufactured goods, as oil revenues diminish the country will experience adverse effects which include . . . an adverse balance of payments of such proportions that severely deflationary measures would be needed".

That was exactly what happened.

The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) referred to social dumping both in an intervention and in his speech, giving me the opportunity to put on record the Opposition's views on what he describes as social dumping. It is right and proper that the wealthier trading nations of the world should accept competition from those that are less wealthy, but not on the backs of impoverished people who will stay impoverished in order to maintain their competitiveness. There should be economic growth in the world as well as human development so that, as internal markets expand and wealth increases, there can be more trade with industrialised nations both in imports and exports. The hon. Gentleman also referred to a speech made yesterday by a Foreign Office Minister.

We believe that there should be a balance between those who are working and the sale of goods for export. There could be mechanisms to assist development so that, as a country ceases to be one of the very poorest and acquires higher living standards, it would be expected to meet a new set of obligations on workers' rights under a new social chapter for the WTO. I want it clearly on the record that we are talking not about social dumping but about raising the living standards of exporting countries.

I referred earlier to a document from the Institute of Export and NCM Credit Insurance Ltd. It mentioned the fact that the banks were not as helpful as they might be in our export drive. It might help to put on record two or three other points made in that document. It stated that 53 per cent. of exporters use credit insurance and only one in four respondents realised that it can be used for purposes other than credit protection. Its summary states:

"Unfortunately, too many British exporters still feel that they can invoice in sterling, insist on letters of credit and ignore the crucial need to train staff to respond to international cultures.

Although there has been a marginal improvement since the 1993 Survey, many areas of support for exporters still fall below what is needed."

I appreciated the speech of the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page). He and I tramped the wrong side of the streets together in Workington back in 1976, but he had a remarkable by-election victory. When he looks back on that and compares it with the Conservatives' present by-election defeats, he will realise that every coin has two sides. He mentioned a variety of measures that were taken in the 1960s. He referred to the National Enterprise Board which, of course, saved Leyland and Rover and made it possible for Rover ultimately to be taken over by BMW.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) said that the competitiveness document was music to his ears. However, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham admitted that it did not place enough emphasis on marketing. We would also claim that it does not place enough emphasis on quality and high technology rather than low technology. It seems that the Government believe that price is the only element in competitiveness —keeping wages down and being competitive in that way. That will not work in low-technology goods because there will always be other countries that can produce the same goods more cheaply than we can.

The hon. Member for Gravesham made an interesting and erudite speech. His knowledge of Portuguese is equal to my knowledge of French. We could have a debate in two different languages if the House would allow—we would probably have more of a meeting of minds than we do in English. He referred to GATT and the poorer countries and used phrases such as " the begging bowl". One thing that is clear is that GATT is incomplete at present. It needs a social chapter, an enhanced platform for the environment and a better relationship with the third world. They could be arranged over time. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that if there were proper trade with third-world countries, they could improve their standard of living and not be a burden on the industrialised world as we know it.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire knows that I have a great affection for him. He mentioned Red Robbo and Lame Duck. I can remember Red Robbo but not Lame Duck—perhaps I missed that particular cartoon. In the 1970s, the trade unions were supposedly rampant—at least that was the impression that the Conservatives like to give —but the Minister and the hon. Gentleman failed to ask, "Where was the management? What were they doing?" It was a Labour Government who brought in Michael Edwardes to manage the British Motor Corporation or British Leyland as it became, because we saw the difficulties. We saw that management was not managing.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman remind me whom the Labour Government brought in as vice-chairman of British Leyland?

Mr. Bell: I should like to be reminded by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McLoughlin: It was Sir Ian MacGregor.

Mr. Bell: I am glad to have brought Mr. MacGregor into the debate. I listened to the diaries of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) on the radio and he was talking about the day when Mr. MacGregor asked Mr. McGahey to play golf. One can imagine the conversation between Mr. McGahey the Scotsman and Mr. MacGregor the Canadian, with Mr. McGahey saying, "I have never played golf in my life," and the other gentlemen saying, "It is a wonderful game and we can do business on the golf course.".

It is nice to hear mention of Mr. MacGregor and to know that he is not entirely forgotten. The Conservatives brought him into the mining industry for a specific task, which was unworthy of them and did our coal industry no good. We will reach the ultimate conclusion on that on Tuesday night. I shall not go too far down that road, but on Tuesday night we shall see the culmination of 50 years of vendetta by Conservative Administrations against a specific industry which they consider to be the vanguard of socialism. But that is another debate.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire mentioned Radio Moscow. I remember how, when I was the candidate at Hexham, travelling over the hills and dales at night, I was able to listen to Radio Moscow and be appraised of the latest production of pig iron in the various Soviet states.

I shall end on the point raised by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham about the number of debates on subjects such as exports. They are our better debates, because knowledge can be brought forward and put on the record.

We all agree that Britain as a nation state must export. We are an island economy, part of the European Union and full-time, fully paid-up members of GATT and we consider the expansion of world trade and our part in that as important to us, but we have to get away from the ideology and develop a strategy. We have to get away from believing that, simply by producing a document on competitiveness, we have changed the world; we have not and we have a difficult role to play.

I said earlier that the French are increasing their share of the world market. Ours has stabilised following years of decline. That may be good enough in the short term; it is not good enough in the long term. The Opposition will be vigilant—though the serried ranks behind me may not demonstrate that at the moment—in holding the Government to account and seeing where the export drive actually goes.

8.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): Perhaps I should start by congratulating the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). It is fair to say that today, the Labour party has spoken with one voice. I can honestly say that we have not had the divergence of opinion that we sometimes hear from the Labour party. I suppose it might have something to do with the fact that we have heard only one voice from the Labour Benches, apart from the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). However, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough has made up for it by the length of his speeches, and I do not intend to follow his example.

After speaking for some 20 minutes, the hon. Gentleman said, "I am just about coming to my speech." Perhaps he was so surprised by the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade that he had to rewrite his own. That is why, after speaking for 20 minutes, he told us that he was coming to his speech.

I am not quite sure what happened in those first 20 minutes, but the hon. Gentleman made some interesting justifications, because he talked about the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the education policy that he may wish to follow for his own children. I say to the hon. Gentleman here and now that nobody objects, or has any intention of objecting, to whatever school the hon. Member for Sedgefield wishes to send his children to, but we welcome the fact that he has chosen a grant-maintained school. The Government pursued that policy because we believed it to be right, and that point was made earlier.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Why do Ministers not send their children to grant-maintained schools?

Mr. McLoughlin: The Labour Whip asks why Ministers do not send our children to grant-maintained schools. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I do, and I am proud of it. William Gilbert is an excellent school, yet Derbyshire county council tried to stop it becoming grant-maintained. I will not take lectures from the hon. Member. Perhaps he should be more careful about choosing his targets before he lets off.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough also said a number of other interesting things. When I tried to intervene on him, and he would not give way, he was saying that the Labour party would look at the effects of the minimum wage and carefully consider how to implement it so as not to put people out of work. The hon. Gentleman is nodding his head in agreement.

It is fascinating to remind him that the Labour party fought the last general election on the introduction of a minimum wage. One would have thought that they might have worked out the policies they were pursuing then. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He accused my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade of not turning sufficient attention to the competitiveness White Paper, which has been broadly welcomed by John Monk, the TEC leaders and a number of other bodies.

Yesterday, we had questions to the Department of Trade and Industry, and we heard Opposition Member after Opposition Member attacking the Government on their trade and industry policy, yet today, when the House is given the opportunity of a full-scale debate on the whole subject, only the hon. Member for Linlithgow has taken part. The score sheet shows that there were nine speakers from the Conservative party, two from the Labour party and one from the Liberal party.

My hon. Friends covered a number of interesting points. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) referred to the problems that he feels have been faced by the scrap metal industry. He told us that it is not waste, and he is absolutely right; it is an important component. He is also right about the importance of recycling those materials. They are not waste; they are materials.

The Government recognise the valuable contribution that recycling industries make to the economy and the environment. The Department of the Environment is working with my Department, and we will continue to monitor the new legislation to ensure that it imposes minimum burdens on the industry.

My hon. Friend referred to the meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside. He was pleased there had been a postponement in part of the implementation of the regulations—a longer delay in registering. I certainly take on board what he said and, in the light of his speech, I will carefully consider the calls that he made on the Government. I will examine the matter closely and see whether we can help him in some way. I cannot give him a commitment at this stage, but I will certainly look into the matter.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow raised six items; the fact that this is an Adjournment debate allowed him to range fairly widely. Local government reform in Scotland, which he raised, is an issue which has been fully dealt with. There is a valid point to make, but it has been fully dealt with in debates at various times.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow also mentioned Motorola, which based in his constituency, or on the edge of it. Not long ago, I was there, and I agree with him about the investment there, and the confidence of the workers both in the jobs that they were doing and in the expansion taking place there.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say that more should be done for the quarrying industry, and suggested that import substitution could take place. When he talks about the quarrying industry, he hits on a raw nerve in some areas of the country, because quarrying is not usually welcomed by local people—but his points were valid.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of markets ouverts with me in Committee on the Sale of Goods (Amendment) Bill. Earl Ferrers, the Minister of State, Home Office, responded to the hon. Gentleman on 17 June and dealt with some of the points that he made then. The hon. Gentleman also asked about Iran, Iraq and Libya, and the Minister for Trade will respond to his questions in more detail in due course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) made an interesting contribution which will make interesting reading in the record of our proceedings. I will certainly consider the points that he made.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) spoke about telecommunications, but I disagreed with quite a lot of what he said. We must acknowledge that the cable television companies are making huge investments in this country, and I do not believe that that would have happened if they had believed that BT or Mercury could enter the entertainment market. There is nothing to stop either BT or Mercury providing cable television companies, but that has to be done in the same way as the cable television companies act. That is important.

BT still has 97 or 98 per cent. of the domestic market for telephones. It is important to bring about competition, and the White Paper that set out our policies in 1991 has led to huge investment in this country by cable television companies. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

The hon. Gentleman said that the cable television companies would serve only about 10 per cent. of the population, but he is wrong. The current cable licences will serve about 60 per cent. of the population—a substantial percentage. Of course, there are greater problems with rural areas and some of the more remote areas, but that is true even now of some terrestrial transmissions in certain parts of the country. The situation is not exactly as the hon. Gentleman painted it, and I am convinced that the investment would not have come about without the policies set out in the White Paper.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) made a speech which mirrored several of the objectives for which the President of the Board of Trade called. I wholly agree with what he said about trade associations, and the need for them to combine in certain areas so as to speak for their trade with one concerted voice. My hon. Friend gave examples of trade associations that do an effective job.

That follows a speech that my right hon. Friend gave last year—to a CBI dinner, I believe—in which he urged trade associations to get their act together. He said that some of them should combine so as to speak with a more united voice. What my hon. Friend has said on that subject tonight is absolutely correct.

My hon. Friend also talked about changes taking place at the Department of Trade and Industry. I do not want to comment on that subject at this stage in the parliamentary year, but my hon. Friend will have heard from various other people more important than I that they may share his view about continuity being a good thing for the Department.

My hon. Friend also described how we have pushed the export promoters and brought them in. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) talked about that, too. That is a welcome change, and has brought a dramatic new input on exports into the Department, which has produced the important line on that subject taken under the leadership of the President of the Board of Trade and the Minister for Trade.

My hon. Friend also referred to the nuclear review, and when I deal with the nuclear issue I shall deal with what he said and also with what my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) said. That subject took up a major part of my hon. Friend's speech, and I listened with great interest to what both my hon. Friends said about it. I will certainly draw the attention of the Minister for Energy to their remarks and to the matters that they raised. They were both thoughtful and interesting speeches, and I will ask the Minister for Energy to respond to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)—it seems odd to refer only to Conservative Members, but, as no other Opposition Member has spoken, all I can do is to respond to my hon. Friends— made some important points about the importance of south American markets. I was in Brazil last year. I am glad that we have managed to restore some Export Credits Guarantee Department cover in relation to Brazil, which is important. He referred to the visit by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to Brazil, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade intends to go there.

Comments were made about the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In recent years, the Foreign Office has been working increasingly closely in partnership with the DTI to help exporters. That is a key priority of the Foreign Office, which devotes more resources to supporting exporters than to any other activity. Industry often compliments it on the valuable help that it provides —a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant).

Our embassies are helping our industries, which is essential. Time and again, we receive the message from industry that it is grateful to our embassies around the world for the help they give in getting them to understand

[Mr. McLoughlin]

and capture markets. Some of the slight criticisms of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire were perhaps out of date and not relevant, because there has been a substantial change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire reviewed some of the changes that have taken place and have allowed British industry to become successful and profitable and to look for export markets. Exporting is difficult, but its rewards are important. It involves finding new and challenging markets.

I know my hon. Friend's constituency well. I served on a district council in that constituency for quite some time before I entered the House. His constituency is spread across a large distance, and the middle part of it is an industrial heartland. It is essential that companies always have their eye on exporting and the way in which exports can be won.

My hon. Friend the Member Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) rightly paid tribute to the achievements of the university of Buckingham's export drive. She made a point about AEA Technology, which she raised yesterday during oral questions. That is a matter for my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, and I will draw his attention to her strong feelings on the subject.

I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham who said that privatisation was one of our most successful exports, which is partly true. Without doubt, privatised companies are winning world markets. Time and again, they were constrained from doing so because of Treasury rules and the fact that they were in the public sector and taxpayers had to underwrite commitments.

The BT/MCI deal is important in relation to winning world markets. The hon. Member for Cheltenham talked about world markets, British Telecom and the technology and software industry. I agree with him on most of those matters, although I disagree about domestic BT policy. It is essential that our companies win world markets and privatisation of companies has achieved that. They have started to export some of their technologies and knowledge to other countries.

More than ever, the Government are committed to helping United Kingdom companies win overseas markets. To achieve that, we are developing a long-term export strategy involving increased partnership between Government and industry. The United Kingdom has always been a great trading nation. We export 25 per cent. of what we produce and, per head of population, we export more than the United States of America and even Japan.

In the three months to April 1994, the volume of non-EC exports rose by 11 per cent. Since 1981, the volume of UK exports has grown faster than that of France, Germany, Italy and Japan, yet all the Opposition do is carp, complain and bemoan our achievements. On a subject such as this, I should have thought that they could give British industry a little credit for what it has achieved, instead of talking it down.

We have recently seen dramatic increases in exports to markets as diverse as Hong Kong, South Korea and the United States. In 1993, the value of our visible exports exceeded £121 billion and our visible earnings passed £114 billion—an increase of more than 10 per cent. on 1992, despite the recession hitting hard in many overseas markets.

Our competitive advantage lies in the quality of our products, delivered at the right price and with quality service, but in this ever more competitive world we must fight even harder merely to keep our share of the market. Foreign markets provide a stern test of our products and services. World trade is set to grow between 5 and 10 per cent., helped by the successful completion of the GATT round.

Everyone is keen to get a piece of the action. There are many great opportunities, but threats are posed by industries abroad. To meet those challenges, it is crucial that more firms treat exporting as an integral part of their business strategy, meeting and beating the world's best in overseas markets.

Competitiveness is a continuing challenge. The Government have a key role to play in increasing our competitive edge by providing good-quality information, advice and support for exporters. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, along with the Prime Minister, is leading the most important export drive that this country has seen for decades.

The Government are harnessing and driving this export initiative across the private and public sectors, involving all Government Departments. As many of my hon. Friends have said, exporting is not merely a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office; all Departments with a sponsor role have a part to play.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend recognise the tremendous effort that the royal family make in promoting British exports?

Mr. McLoughlin: That is absolutely true. The royal family play an important part in our export drive.

The DTI and the Foreign Office jointly provide a first-class information and advice service for the United Kingdom's exporters under the banner of overseas trade services. Overall, the Government spend about £170 million on overseas trade services, and that amount becomes larger when all the help offered by Government Departments is taken into account.

Business plays a vital part in our strategy. The Government's principal adviser on trade promotion and activity is British business, in the form of the British Overseas Trade Board. Under the chairmanship of Sir Derek Hornby, the BOTB is made up of a dozen senior business people, who freely give their time and experience to help and determine the best use of our export promotion funds. DTI and Foreign Office Ministers attach much weight to the board's advice.

In addition to the board, there is a network of more than 200 business people with experience of markets around the world who help through 14 geographical area advisory groups. They ensure that the needs of business are reflected in the overseas trade services operation and help to formulate specific initiatives to increase trade, such as the "North America Now Campaign" and the "Indo-British Partnership".

Our business faces great challenges in a fiercely competitive world, but there are also great opportunities, not least in the fast-growing markets of the far east and elsewhere. We have made significant improvements to our export services to enhance the export drive. We will

continue to work in partnership with business to ensure that the United Kingdom's firms continue to win in world markets.

A number of my hon. Friends paid tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry. There is no doubt about the gusto that he has brought to his role and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham said, his leadership is helping to drive British trade higher and higher, and we should all be grateful to him.

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

PETITION

Student Grants

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I beg leave to present a petition to the House signed by 2,000 students at Southampton university who have expressed their opposition to the cuts in student grants that will be introduced next year and in successive years. Students already live on incomes lower than those on income support and housing benefit. The proposals will leave students in great debt when they finish their courses.

The petition reads:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petitioners of Southampton students declare that we the undersigned register our opposition to the cut in student grants by 10 per cent. this year, next year and the year after.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons should ensure that proper levels of funding are available for student grants.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Water Boreholes, Fron

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

9.15 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue of great concern to myself and a number of my constituents—damage caused to private properties in the Fron area of Montgomeryshire as a result of water borehole operations.

We often hear from the English that an Englishman's home is his castle. But most of the finest castles are not in England but in Wales. Whether it be those castles in Wales or the lesser dwellings occupied by most of us, people in Wales feel strongly that our homes should be sacrosanct against invaders of any kind. They should be sacrosanct against burglars—the level of burglary in rural Wales is still mercifully low—and Government Departments invading our privacy and the safety of our homes in the name of mere statutory and utilitarian powers.

We look to the House as being the only place where that principle can find protection. Some people have expressed the view—the noble Lord Hailsham is perhaps the most notable—that the House can no longer adequately protect the interests of private citizens. I do not believe that to be the case yet and I hope that the Minister's response will show that my confidence in the House remains justified.

The invasion of my constituents' properties is serious, although it affects but a small group of people. Those mainly affected live in a settlement known locally as the Fron near Montgomery. I know the place well as my home lies less than two miles away by road—perhaps one mile as the crow flies. In the settlement of Fron are three houses with gardens whose owners have approached me about the matter. I have been involved with the matter in some detail. The homes have the arcadian names of Abernant, Silvermere and Cherrylea. All are—or, at least, were—comfortable homes with well-tended gardens. I hope that I will be forgiven for calling their occupants active, mature citizens who are valued in our local community of Montgomeryshire. They are the last people whom one would expect to be moved to lobby and protest through this House.

The three properties are a few hundred metres from the River Severn—less than a quarter of a mile from the river as it flows through that area of Montgomeryshire. Between the river and their properties there lie a substantial field, the A483 trunk road, which is sometimes dignified with the style, "the Manchester to Swansea trunk road", although only a lunatic would use it for that purpose, and the Montgomery canal. A major gas line also passes through the field, transporting the mains supply of natural gas under high pressure.

The road carries a large volume of traffic. Its safety and security are of paramount importance. The canal, although no longer used for the purpose for which it was designed —the carriage of goods—nevertheless is increasingly used as a leisure facility because it is an especially beautiful canal, with leafy towpaths. The bank of the canal has already started to slip, which is significant in relation to the subject that I shall mention.

Severn Trent Water Ltd. is the villain of the piece, or at least the principal villain. Severn Trent is, as I am sure that you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a privatised water utility, which continues to act as the water undertaking for

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Shropshire and other places, including one part of Wales only. The rest of Wales is covered by Dwr Cymru—Welsh Water—but Montgomeryshire still has its water supplied by Severn Trent. Generally, we have benefited from that historical anomaly because, on the whole, Severn Trent is helpful and responsive to customer complaints and although its charges are high, they could be higher.

In 1991, Severn Trent sought, and was granted by the National Rivers Authority, a licence for test pumping by the River Severn in the field to which I have referred. The licence required the monitoring of water levels in a number of specified wells.

The area consists of one side of a typical glacial river valley. The bedrocks, I am reliably informed, consist of Silurian—that is to say, slightly more than 450 million years old—mudstones and siltstones, which dip to the north-west. Overlying the bedrock are fluvial and glacial deposits, which are highly variable in their composition, density, porousness and other relevant properties.

In granting the licence, the NRA appears to have made, to put it mildly, scanty demands of Severn Trent. The NRA relied on Severn Trent to perform an appropriate survey for the selection of monitoring wells. Oddly, existing wells —for example, one at the property Silvermere—were not chosen for that purpose. It seems that the local survey did not identify the well at Silvermere. That omission is highly suggestive of a negligent survey, for it appears that, in spite of the well's proximity, at 300 m from the pumping site, Severn Trent simply did not know of it. Had it asked in the local post office, or asked any local resident, it would no doubt have been told of it. The well would have been observable from certain maps and, of course, from an aerial view. Two other wells, only 100 or 200 yd further from the pumping site, were not identified either. It was a very scanty survey.

The first test pumping at the site took place in November 1991. The first signs of cracking in the walls of the property, Abernant, appeared shortly after that, but it was not realised then that there was likely to be a connection between the pumping and what at first appeared to be relatively minor damage. However, further pumping of a much more dramatic sort took place in 1992, particularly in the period from 7 September to 5 October 1992.

During the 28-day pumping period, collapse and subsidence were observed at three locations. The company, Severn Trent, was informed by my constituents part way through its drilling that damage had occurred, but it did not stop drilling. It continued drilling and the damage was thus exacerbated.

The main collapse occurred in the field opposite Silvermere in the following sequence. On the night of 24 to 25 September 1992, collapse in the field was observed and it was reported on the morning of 25 September. On 26 September, the hole was photographed. The hole shown in the field at that time was irregular and large, but not very large—approximately 3 m by 5 m and 2 m deep. But by 27 September, the next day, the hole had increased in size to approximately 16 m by 22 m and 10 m deep. It would have held two or three double decker buses.

The test pumping finished on 5 October; by then, the sides of the hole were vertical for about 2 to 3 m, then curved to the bottom. The description given locally was that the hole was deep enough for a double decker bus although, in reality, it would have held a garage of double decker buses by then. The collapsed hole was refilled within a week by Severn Trent.

Another effect noted at the time was that three local wells ran dry or so close to dry that no abstraction could take place from them, which had never happened before. The wells were not drying up due to dry weather. I must admit that, wonderful holiday area though Montgomeryshire is, by 5 October we do not expect the wells to dry up in ordinary weather.

Another feature that was noticed at that time was extensive cracking in four locations. The three houses, Abernant, Silvermere and Cherry Lea, and also, worryingly, in bridge No. 140 over the Montgomeryshire canal. I have been to see the cracking, which continues to expand in a worrying way. Ground subsidence of up to 9 inches also occurred at that time in the gardens and fields at the Fron. One of the gardens, which was particularly well looked after, has changed dramatically in its topography since the bore hole operations. Ground subsidence of up to about 3 ft also occurred in the fields next to the river, bringing out something that had not been seen for a long time: the line of an old river channel.

Another matter that was noticed was the effect on the well at the property, Silvermere. My understanding is that, to this day, that well has not recovered and the water depth remains at only 1 ft against the normal expected level of 4 to 6 ft.

All those effects were noted and caused great alarm. As a result, my constituents set about obtaining some technical evidence. Fortunately, the son of one couple—the people who live in Abernant, Mr. and Mrs. Gleave—is a hydrogeologist; otherwise, they would not have known where to turn. He and a colleague prepared a careful report on what had occurred, and I believe that the report's findings are entirely objective. It is good scientific work.

In a sentence, what has been found is that the drilling of the boreholes has caused a significant change in the local hydrogeology. No other cause for the change can be found; nor has any other cause been suggested with any sense of conviction or any evidential support. It is clear to the people who know the area that a cause-and-effect relationship exists. Before the boreholes, there was no subsidence. As soon as they were started, the subsidence started. As the borehole operations were increased, the subsidence dramatically increased. And at the height of the borehole operations, a hole the size of a double-decker bus garage appeared, and no one has been able to give any realistic explanation besides a cause-and-effect relationship.

Recently, nearly two years after these events, Severn Trent appointed a Professor Hutchinson of Imperial college, London, to write a report on what has occurred. It is impossible to understand why Severn Trent has taken so long about this. It is to be hoped that the report will be available very soon. I am pleased to say that I was informed this morning on the telephone by a legal adviser to Severn Trent that efforts will be made to expedite the report. But the residents have now waited two years for Severn Trent to recognise the cause-and-effect relationship, despite their own clear evidence of one.

I suspect that the company has delayed so long because it finds it hard to admit to its negligence, for there is certainly clear evidence of negligence by Severn Trent. It failed to exercise proper professional care, in that it did not

adopt the normal professionally recommended procedures in this case; it did not, for instance, report the situation to the appropriate local authorities to ensure that no damage to the surrounding properties, roads, bridges and canal would occur in the event of collapse or subsidence. The company failed to carry out proper tests of the local geology.

It is extraordinary that when the collapse occurred on the land, Severn Trent did not inform the NRA of what had happened. The NRA found out only because a local resident rang it up and told it. As a result, an NRA officer had to visit the scene to find out for herself whether it was true.

Not only has there been professional negligence by Severn Trent but local residents have enjoyed less care than they were entitled to expect from the National Rivers Authority. In correspondence, the NRA has stated that it has no jurisdiction to protect property from the structural effects of water abstraction and no power to refuse or qualify a licence on the ground of structural defects. The test pumping certainly did not set out any requirements concerning either the procedures that should be undertaken in the case of adverse structural effects on the local geology or adverse effects on the local water table. Perhaps, the National Rivers Authority—foolishly—took it for granted that Severn Trent would approach the matter with proper professionalism.

It is also regrettable that the NRA, in granting the licence, appeared to have paid no attention to any possibility of an effect on the area surrounding the boreholes. As I have already said, the canal bridge and the canal bank have been damaged. I understand that British Waterways, which is ultimately responsible for the canal, is concerned about the situation. I understand that the Ministers's Department, the Welsh Office, has been monitoring the trunk road to see whether any damage has been caused to that and that it is concerned. The bridge to which I referred earlier is all too evidently patched and cracked.

The damage to the three properties has been very severe indeed. It will cost many thousands of pounds to repair it. However, another aspect of the damage to the properties is that they have suffered a significant diminution in their value. If the owners wanted to sell their properties, it is almost inevitable that purchasers would be put off and would require a huge reduction in price because there was and has been serious subsidence. It is likely that the value of those properties may well have been reduced by a half to two thirds. The residents concerned are respected and respectable people, but they are not rich. None can afford the consequences of such an attack on their largest asset.

One may ask, what is the problem? Surely, if Severn Trent has caused that damage by its water boreholes and if it has been negligent—perhaps, even if it has not been negligent—it will pay up. Not a bit of it. We have received from Severn Trent something that one may expect to receive from me at my more legalistic moments—po-faced legal pedantry. It is the sort of legal pedantry that is extremely hostile to people such as my constituents. I shall quote from two letters. One is from the district manager of Severn Trent, Mr. Ashcroft, who, I must say, is usually extremely helpful and I do not believe for one moment that Mr. Ashcroft is responsible for the words in the letter. He says:

"the company solicitor has advised me that even if the damage to your constituents' properties has occurred as a result of our activities, we have no legal liability. I understand that this opinion was derived from case law involving ground-water levels being affected by the carrying out of legal acts.

I have also been advised that it would not be appropriate for the Company to make an 'ex gratia' or other payment to Mr. Gleave or any other party."

A little later, on 11 April, 1994, Mr. J. T. Rhead, the area solicitor-west for Severn Trent Water said in a letter to another local resident:

"As you may be aware, much of the law relating to England and Wales arises not from Acts of Parliament ("statute law"), but from the decisions of the Courts going back in some cases centuries ("case law"). As a result of case law, the legal position is that where surface damage arises as a result of lawful interference with water in undefined channels in underground strata, that damage carries with it no legal liability. There are perhaps half a dozen cases directly bearing on this question, and all confirm that legal principle. The most recent, something under ten years ago, was Stephens v Anglian Water Authority. On the basis of these cases, we will of necessity have to strenuously deny any suggestion of liability, even assuming that there were a definitely proven connection between our pumping activities down by the river and damage either at your property or elsewhere."

That denial of liability contradicts something that had previously been said by a representative of Severn Trent. On 21 September 1993, a Mr. Bramley of Severn Trent met Mr. Gleave—who, with Mrs. Gleave, owns the house Abernant—in the presence of his solicitor Mrs. Snow, a local solicitor in Bishop's Castle. Mr. Bramley said categorically that it was the practice of Severn Trent to provide compensation for loss and damage arising from water abstraction and that funds were available for such contingencies. That was a welcome commitment, but it appears to have been withdrawn in an attempt to rely upon a set of ancient legalities which, if they were right, would have no relevance to this modern age.

On the face of it, Severn Trent is saying that there is a wrong without a remedy. Surely that cannot be acceptable to the Government. The water utilities claim in their correspondence the right to interfere with the underground strata with total impunity. I hope that we will hear from the Minister that they are wrong and that it was never the Government's intention on privatisation to give the water utilities total security from legal action.

I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that privatised utilities were not given powers that are available even to the state only in extreme emergencies. What is claimed would be the equivalent of requisition without either compensation or reward.

Putting it simply, what is claimed by Severn Trent is a licence to be negligent. Surely the Government cannot accept—and I am sure that the Minister's advice would weigh with Severn Trent—that if what would otherwise be lawful borehole operations are carried out with negligence, there is an immunity from civil liability. It would be ludicrous to say that that is correct.

The House is the repository of the rights and duties of citizens. The citizens for whom I speak tonight could not be more dutiful people. I ask the Minister to confirm in his reply that their legitimate expectation of redress is one which the Government will confirm.

9.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I appreciate the importance of the concerns raised by the hon. and learned Member for

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). I fully sympathise with them, and I shall deal with them as well with the broader background of the matter.

Severn Trent Water is currently seeking to develop a new source of water supply at Abermule to enable it to give a better service to a large area of Montgomeryshire between Welshpool and Llanidloes. I understand that the existing supply at Llandinam, which serves a population of about 20,000, is near the limits of its capacity. In 1993-94, the average demand on Llandinam treatment works was 13.4 megalitres per day, compared with the permitted daily abstraction licence figure of 13.7.

That leaves little or no spare capacity for growth in demand or to accommodate the sort of peak demands that could be expected during a prolonged dry period. Apart from Llandinam, there is no other existing source of any substance available to meet the demands of the area. The new source being investigated at Abermule is intended to have a similar output to the source at Llandinam and would be linked into the distribution system, to reduce demand on Llandinam and to provide for future growth. It would also provide increased security in the event of equipment or power failure at Llandinam.

Although a number of alternative sources to Abermule are theoretically possible, I am advised that they all have major disadvantages in terms of delay, cost, water quality or practicality.

As to Severn Trent Water's actions in undertaking the test pumping operations at Abermule, the land on which the boreholes were constructed was purchased at auction by the company in April 1989. Before that, general geophysical cross-sections of the valley had been undertaken in the Abermule area, to identify the parts of the valley that might provide fruitful exploration for a public water supply source. Ordnance Survey geological maps were also studied by the company to obtain hydro-geological inferences before the land was bought.

The boreholes were constructed under consents to drill and to test-pump, issued by the National Rivers Authority. Planning permission was not required. Initially, a small exploratory borehole of 10 inches diameter was constructed to test the geology and water quality characteristics and to allow an estimate of the potential for obtaining an exploitable yield from production-sized boreholes.

That pilot hole gave good results, and production holes of 508 mm diameter were then constructed by the company. There are three production-sized boreholes on the site—all around 54 m deep. I am advised that all boreholes on the site have solid lining to a depth of approximately 54 m to stabilise the holes, with slotted screen below the level to the bottom of the holes. The boreholes were constructed to be stable, to prevent local collapse, and were screened to prevent the ingress of any large volumes of the surrounding gravels and other uncemented strata during pumping.

The boreholes were test-pumped singly and in groups. The water was discharged to the River Severn via an open-top weir tank for measurement.

The test pumping was undertaken under a consent issued by the National Rivers Authority, and a number of local water sources in the area that the authority specified in the consent were measured. The company maintains that it complied with good practice, in that the development was staged with pilot exploration work prior to proceeding.

Full-scale test pumping was started at a low rate from individual holes, and only later increased to pairs of boreholes being pumped. All observations required by the NRA were undertaken. When it became apparent that other wells existed outside the specified area and were affected, they were measured. I am advised that is the usual staged approach to good groundwater developments.

The hon. and learned Gentleman expressed concern about the possible wider effects of the pumping operations on a nearby trunk road and on the Montgomery canal. As to the latter, I am advised that the problem is confined to the ground below an accommodation bridge at Abernant. The situation is being carefully monitored by British Waterways, which has advised that it will take any steps necessary to protect its own property and the safety of those on and alongside the canal, including users of the adjacent highway.

As to the A483 trunk road, Powys county council—as the agent of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—has been asked to pay particular attention to the section of the road at Garthmyl during its normal monthly safety inspections. I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that the situation will be carefully monitored, but at present there does not appear to be any need for immediate concern.

Following the test pumping operations, there were reports by local residents of possible subsidence—exactly as the hon. and learned Gentleman said. In response, the company commissioned and paid for a professional examination of the three houses involved. Indications from the examination are, I am informed, that the damage does not put the structures at risk of collapse, being mainly superficial.

In addition, the NRA required that a number of identified wells and boreholes in the local area be monitored and measured during the test pumping. During the later stages of, and also after, test pumping, a number of other wells were reported to have been affected and monitoring was immediately initiated. Only two wells were in regular use, other than for garden watering, and an alternative source of water was provided.

Although at present there is no known direct geological linkage between the damage and Severn Trent Water's activities, the company has taken the step of appointing an independent geological consultant, Professor J. N. Hutchinson, of Imperial College, London. He is an expert in geotechnics, engineering geology and engineering geomorphology.

The brief of the consultant is to provide an independent assessment of the events to date, to examine the data gathered, both incidental to works carried out and that resulting from specifically initiated research, to advise on proposed further investigations and submit a report addressing the implications of developing the source from the point of view of ground stability. The consultant will also investigate the reason for the appearance of three holes in fields near the boreholes during the second period of pumping in September and October 1992.

The company will consider the findings of that independent assessment and will consider its course of action on that basis. I understand that it is the company's intention to make the report available to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

The company has stated that it will not undertake any further pumping from the site until Professor Hutchinson's report is available. Other than for test pumping, the company will require a licence from the NRA to abstract water from underground strata. The company advertised its proposed licence application in July and August 1992. Its application was received by the NRA on 24 August 1992. No objections were received during the statutory period. A licence has not yet been granted by the NRA, pending further legal agreement with Severn Trent Water.

I am advised that there was a disruption to private supplies to two properties during the initial pumping stage. No further properties are expected to be affected, since the operational pumping regime will be less rigorous than that during the test pumping. Temporary alternative supplies were provided to those affected during testing, but the legal agreements required by the NRA as a condition for granting a possible licence have been reached by the company and both parties concerned whereby their properties will be connected to the mains at no cost to themselves. A capital sum would be paid to each to compensate for the higher cost of mains water by comparison with the private source, should the new source be developed.

On the legal and compensation issues raised in the debate, Severn Trent Water was, as I have already said, duly entitled to undertake the test pumping operations at Abermule under the terms of a consent granted by the NRA. The authority is entitled to give consent—without the full advertisement procedure required for licences—for boreholes for the purposes of looking for water in underground strata, or for testing the effect of borehole abstraction.

Otherwise, a full licence is needed, which carries with it the requirement to advertise the proposal locally and nationally and to give all those affected the opportunity to comment. An abstraction licence application was advertised in this case, and no objections were received.

Given the purposes of the Water Resources Act 1991, the NRA is not expected to consider the effects of a consent or licence other than those on water resources, the aquatic environment and the protected rights of others to abstract water. The control system is not there to reinforce the law generally on the question of the support owed by one landowner to another.

A right of abstraction can be available to any person, subject to the consent powers of the NRA. Severn Trent Water is not relying upon any specific powers in its role as a water undertaker in order to carry out the operation. Nevertheless, Severn Trent has a general duty to maintain a water supply system by virtue of section 37 of the Water Industry Act 1991, and its activities must be judged against that duty.

Water undertakers have powers to carry out works on land that they do not own, and for that purpose they may compulsorily acquire land and rights over land. They may also enter premises for the purposes of survey and to search for water. In such circumstances, schedules 6 and 11 to the Water Industry Act govern the payment of compensation. However, such provisions are not applicable where the water undertaker is seeking solely to exercise rights that are available to any landowner, such as rights of abstraction conferred by the Water Resources Act.

As I have said, the action of Severn Trent Water is one that any landowner is entitled to take. In these circumstances, the usual legal remedies are open to any complainant, who may seek legal redress through the courts in the form of a private action in negligence or nuisance.

I understand the concerns that have been raised by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery. Nevertheless, a balance has to be drawn between protecting people's property rights, protecting the aquatic environment and countryside and ensuring that the necessary water is available for public and private supplies, industry and agriculture.

I have already said that planning permission was not required for the test pumping operations at Abermule. However, it is possible that, if the borehole is to become a permanent structure, planning permission may be necessary. In that event, it may be open to the council to request the preparation of an environmental impact assessment, although such a request would be subject to the usual appeals procedures.

I stress that I fully sympathise with those who have suffered damage to their houses and properties, but it is still premature to say with certainty that that damage has been caused by the test-pumping operations. It is also premature to suggest anything other than that the company's operations were properly and professionally carried out, and were within the requirements of the responsible authorities. New water resources need to be found if demands are to be met in this area, and that is the background to Severn Trent's operations.

The company, as the statutory undertaker for the area, has a general duty to develop and maintain water supply systems, to ensure adequate and sustainable supplies. Those parties whose private water supplies may be affected by the operation have been offered a mains water supply at no additional cost to themselves.

The company has taken the responsible step of commissioning an independent report from an acknowledged expert in this area. I suggest to the House that we have to await his findings. Ultimately, it is for the individuals who feel that they may have been affected to seek legal redress if they consider that they have suffered damage as a result of the company's operations.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman is aware, I have written to the company seeking its further views on the matter. If, as a result of the correspondence, there is anything I can add to what I have said, I shall write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 June 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Heathrow (Third Runway)

9.34 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I beg to present a petition of 7,335 signatures from the London borough of Hillingdon with the full support of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), who is in his place beside me, and in the interest of our neighbour my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson).

The petition of the London borough of Hillingdon, its residents and other interested residents in the surrounding area.

Declares that the blight in the surrounding area and the uncertainty surrounding the illustrative scheme contained in the RUCATSE report—

by the working party to examine the need for runway capacity in the south-east of England—

in addition to the unprecedented scale of environmental damage a third runway at Heathrow would cause is an unacceptable burden on thousands of residents.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons' early as possible outright rejection of Heathrow as an option for further runway capacity in the south-east, and certainly before the end of 1994.

And the petitioners remain your sincere servants.

To lie upon the table.

Leisure Industry

9.35 am

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates the Department of National Heritage on its first two years; recognises its contribution to the development of leisure in the United Kingdom; calls for a continuing debate on the purposes for which the proceeds of the National Lottery should be used; and expresses the hope that, in future, encouragement will thereby be given to the promotion of more active leisure pursuits.

This is the first time for a number of years that the House has had the opportunity to discuss the leisure industry in this country. I do not have to point out the importance of leisure to all of us. It is a major industry, employing some 1.5 million people—7.4 per cent. of the work force—with annual consumer expenditure running to £85 billion.

The Department of National Heritage spends just under £1 billion on promoting and supporting a variety of leisure-related activities but it is essentially a consumer-led private sector industry. All of us make decisions on leisure most days of our lives, and we spend on average £41 per household each week on leisure goods and services, or 15 per cent. of total household expenditure. I want to explore a number of issues that concern the leisure industry and, at the same time, review the role and activities of the Department of National Heritage, which has now been in existence for a little over two years.

It will also be appropriate to consider the likely impact of the national lottery, the proceeds from which will go largely into leisure-related activities and which could dramatically improve the quality of sporting, artistic and other facilities throughout the country. Lottery proceeds will significantly alter the balance between consumers and providers when decisions on spending are to be made and we shall have to be careful not to tip the balance too far towards provision which is of no interest to the general public, who are the ultimate consumers.

Having said that, however, I hope that the debate will focus also on the pursuit of excellence and on the encouragement of success. The nature of leisure and, therefore, of the leisure industry, is always changing. Spending on leisure is, of course, a function of disposable income. As that rises, there is more money for leisure.

Not surprisingly, low-income families typically spend only one tenth of their income on leisure, but that rises to more than a quarter for those on high incomes. Another significant trend is towards home entertainment of different kinds, brought on by the growth of television and video, with the result that leisure has become far more passive than it was. That has also led to the individualisation of leisure—towards what might be called the earplug society. We may have different views on the desirability of those trends, but they are largely technology-driven, and they would be extremely hard to reverse in a free society.

It is, therefore, appropriate to begin this review of leisure by considering the increasingly important area of television and video, which are the dominant features of home entertainment. Last year, a Gallup survey revealed that 53 per cent. of respondents regarded watching a good film on television as a good way to spend an evening at home, while 29 per cent. said the same about hiring a video.

In contrast, 42 per cent. endorsed listening to music at home, and 40 per cent. reading a good book. Of those surveyed, 41 per cent. of males were attracted by the notion of a romantic evening at home, while only 38 per cent. of females felt the same. Similarly, 28 per cent. of males opted for cooking and eating in, whereas only 23 per cent. of females wished to join them.

It is estimated that the average television viewer spends three hours 45 minutes every day watching television—viewing figures are lower in the summer and higher in the winter. On average, people aged over 55 and housewives watch more than four hours of television each day. Television audiences are regularly estimated to account for between a third and a half of the population. Choice is steadily expanding for them.

The number of homes able to receive either cable or satellite television is rapidly increasing, especially as the £6 billion cable-laying programme reaches most major towns and cities, bringing 30 channels of television to each home.

In my constituency, more than 30 per cent. of homes are already connected to cable and, therefore, have access to satellite television. I have no quarrel with the principle of expanding choice. It is right that viewers should have access to a variety of programming, but quality is important, too. The number of hours that we spend watching television should also come under scrutiny.

[Mr. Simon Coombs]

Quality comes from adequate funding and soon the Government will have to decide how that funding should be provided. It is hard to see how the BBC can survive in its present form without the licence fee, yet its inevitable decline in market share, coupled with the growth of subscription and pay-per-view television makes the BBC's position look increasingly anachronistic.

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I do not dissent from a word that the hon. Gentleman has said and I greatly respect his opinion. It would be within the rules of the House, however, if, at this point, he declared his interest as parliamentary consultant to British Telecom and Blick International (Communications).

Mr. Coombs: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for reminding the House of what I suspect most hon. Members already knew, because it is in the Register of Members' Interests. I was unaware that it was necessary to declare such an interest, but if the hon. Lady feels better for having got that off her chest, I am happy to put it on the record.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I should like to make a more constructive intervention. Is my hon. Friend aware that the point he made about the licence fee was the very conclusion reached by the Select Committee on National Heritage in its recent report?

Mr. Coombs: I was, of course, aware of that. I always study the work of the Select Committee, even though from time to time I find it necessary to disagree with it. In a few moments, I shall mention another matter and it will be clear to my hon. Friend that I disagree totally with the Select Committee about it.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the advantages of the expansion of the medium of television is that it has given people in different parts of the country the opportunity to see programmes about our leading resorts? Given that my constituency of Blackpool is one of the leading resorts of Britain, and the world, does my hon. Friend agree that there are now greater opportunities for people to see the beauties of Blackpool through the medium of television and that it offers unrivalled opportunities for low and high-income families to enjoy leisure and tourism?

Mr. Coombs: I am not sure what I admire more—my hon. Friend's ready and excellent support for his constituents, who live in half of our premier seaside resort, or his ingenuity in turning my speech back to front. He has got to the last topic in my speech, while I am still trying to deal with the first one. I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend said.

I have no doubt that one of the contributions of television in the past 50 years has been to draw the population's attention to all the delights of Blackpool and, dare I say, those of other seaside resorts, although I hesitate to mention them since my hon. Friend is sitting close behind me. Now that I have dealt with all the pent-up feelings of hon. Members, perhaps I can continue where I left off.

In the end, general taxation may be needed to support the BBC's continuance in its areas of excellence, such as news and current affairs. It is, however, facing increasing challenges to such coverage from its rivals, both terrestrial and satellite, just as Independent Television can match the BBC in drama and cultural programming. Pressure on advertising revenue from commercial radio and television and regional newspapers probably guarantees the survival of the licence fee in the short term. I hope that the Government will want to spell out a long-term vision, which is designed to ensure choice and quality.

It would be wrong to leave the vexed question of the future of television without paying warm tribute to the historic role of the BBC as a purveyor and supporter of arts and sport. For 68 years, the BBC has supported the Henry Wood promenade concerts. BBC Radio 3, now in healthy competition with Classic FM, continues to offer a classic music station unmatched elsewhere in the world.

The BBC's television and radio programmes win countless awards and its sports coverage of popular and minority sport is of uniformly high calibre. As we move towards the era of the information super-highway, when the interactive consumer will be all powerful, that commitment to excellence will be challenged increasingly.

The growth of video recorders adds another dimension to the debate about home leisure. After less than 20 years, the video recorder is pervasive. Surveys reveal that 60 per cent. of the homes of the lowest 10 per cent. of income earners have video recorders. Video cassettes, whether bought, hired or previously recorded from television, have significantly altered the viewing pattern of those households that have worked out how to operate the recorders.

The personal freedom that videos offer makes them an obvious target for the purveyors of pornography and violence. In the interests of children in particular, the Government will have to find a way in which to prevent exploitation and corruption from becoming endemic. It is in the nature of today's technology that freedom and licence are so nearly entwined.

The growth of videos should represent a wonderful opportunity for the British film industry, about which I shall say more later. Although Britons spent £9 billion in 1992 on television and radio, they spent nearly £5 billion on newspapers, books and magazines.

The growth of television news, with its ability to provide rapid coverage of events, has imperceptibly altered the role of newspapers, almost to the point of making that description inaccurate. Newspapers now provide as much opinion and views as hard fact, with plenty of prediction thrown in. The aim seems to be as much entertainment as information, if not more, so gossip and speculation about the famous and not-so-famous compete for space in the endless circulation war.

Freedom of the press is taken as read in this country, but there is also a role for responsibility. That is not a concept which comes readily to mind when one reads the pages of some national newspapers. Once again, the Government will have a tightrope to walk if they seek to balance freedom and responsibility. I suspect that some courage will be needed.

There has been a steady decline in the quality and quantity of reading matter in the home, particularly as a function of the rise of other forms of entertainment. The bestseller lists tell a tale of easy reading in preference to more stimulating material. The answer must lie with the promotion of the classics of literature in schools. Recent anecdotal evidence has not been encouraging and, among the young, the video game is king.

Music in the home has become more and more the province of the compact disc. CD sales are rising every year, by 17 per cent. in 1993 and 27.3 per cent. in 1994 —those are first quarter figures in each year—to 95.6 million in the first quarter of 1994, despite occasional ill-informed complaints about their price. I welcome the fact that record companies, both large ones such as EMI and smaller ones like Chandos and Conifer, have been able to expand their repertoire dramatically through more obscure areas of classic music to the encouragement of new, young composers and artistes in both popular and classic music.

The British music recording industry, which leads the world in its technical and artistic achievements, deserves our strong support, not the constant sniping based on ignorance which sometimes seems to be its lot. I, therefore, welcome the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the industry published yesterday, which clears it completely of the charge of acting against the public interest. The reverse is true.

I have mentioned the great popularity of eating at home. I only wish that the Department for Education would listen to the wise advice of the National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and give the teaching of safe, nutritious cooking a more secure place in the national curriculum, thus helping to reduce the incidence of food poisoning in the home. But I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in danger of straying some distance from my subject.

Staying in during the hours of leisure has become increasingly passive. We listen and we watch, but we hardly create. Few families do without television and radio, and even fewer make their own music or other entertainment, which I regret. Although chess has become increasingly popular in the past 20 years, culminating in Nigel Short bravely challenging for the world championship last year, families generally do less together than in the past. The Victorian stereotype of singing round the piano has long since gone in the vast majority of homes, which leads me to question whether this nation puts enough resources into teaching music in schools.

Even the noble art of conversation is now imperilled by the individualisation of leisure. Articulate speech is becoming harder to find, with phrases like, "you know", "I mean", and "sort of" used as substitutes for punctuation, and the redundant "actually" the favourite means by which infinitives are now split. Perhaps we need to reinvent the family. We certainly need to reinvent the art of communication.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend as horrified as I was to read in yesterday's newspapers that more than 44 per cent. of pregnancies in the United Kingdom are of single mothers?

Mr. Coombs: I wish that I felt happier about the link between split infinitives and unwanted pregnancies. But, as I said to a number of hon. Members before the debate, this is an opportunity for people to talk about most subjects, provided that they are fun. I suppose that, on that basis, I must accept that intervention as being as helpful as it was clearly intended to be.

An honourable exception to the trend towards inactivity is gardening, which remains hugely popular, with more than £2 billion spent on it every year. I am obviously not alone in finding weeding therapeutic.

The Department of National Heritage, together with other Departments of state, can and does influence a number of home-based leisure activities. Forthcoming pronouncements on the media will be of particular importance. However, in the wider world, the Department of National Heritage is a vital catalyst in the effort to provide better facilities and preserve our heritage. Ministers, however, have been content to hand over much of their power to influence events through the well-established policy of the arm's-length relationship with such bodies as the Arts Council.

While that arrangement has the considerable advantage that Ministers can deny responsibility when things go wrong, it is unsatisfactory for Ministers and, therefore, Parliament to be denied a say when mistakes are made. The recent fiasco of the so-called "beauty contest" for the London orchestras made the Arts Council look philistine and Ministers impotent.

The idea that London should be forced to surrender its position as the music capital of the world by the destruction of two of its world-class orchestras was appalling. I should like to think that the new Arts Council for England has completely abandoned such a notion, but can we be sure? Can Ministers be sure? One has only to look at the employment and earnings generated by each of those orchestras to judge the excellence of the return on the grants that they receive. Other European music capitals were aghast at what was proposed, and wait to see whether common sense and pride have now been restored.

I hope that we shall not hear too much talk in this debate about cuts in arts funding. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Arts Council's budget increased from £152.4 million in 1988-89 to £225.6 million in 1993-94. In that context, the recent small reduction in funding should occasion careful thought, perhaps some tough decisions, but not the widespread hysteria which we have witnessed. I wonder whether it is sensible for Ministers to run the risk that others might implement reductions in ways designed to generate maximum distress.

The funding scenario is about to change dramatically. As we celebrate 10 successful years of the business sponsorship incentive scheme, which has produced £64 million in new money and 3,000 first-time business sponsors for the arts, all eyes are now turning to the potential of the national lottery.

A new advisory board will make far-reaching decisions on arts spending up to and beyond the next century. Glittering prospects are already opening up. Naturally, the House would expect me to say that the new concert hall for which many of my constituents in Swindon have long been waiting must be a strong candidate for funding.

In the meantime, guidelines on funding have emphasised the need for matching funding and for longer-term viability. At one extreme of interpretation, one can see a time when every town will have its own arts facilities but insufficient funds to sustain them. At the other extreme, we shall see applications turned down amid general disappointment, because revenue funding cannot be satisfactorily identified and because the Arts Council's existing budget cannot be stretched far enough.

There must be a happy medium, based on the recognition that the Arts Council's budget should never be substituted for lottery funds. I suspect that it lies in recognising that, over time, the emphasis on lottery funds' disposal will gradually shift towards revenue support and

[Mr. Coombs]

away from capital formation. That may mean a slower rate of infrastructure creation, but there should be fewer funding crises at a later date.

Ms Mowlam: I understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about revenue costs being a problem for many capital projects sponsored by the lottery, and none of us wants white elephants to continue until the turn of the century with money that has come from the lottery, but can he explain my worry that, if we accept some revenue costs, additionality battles with the Treasury, whoever is in Government, would be a problem?

Mr. Coombs: Yes, I accept that there is always that risk. We have to live in the real world, and in the real world the Treasury is there, whether we like it or not. However, we have to look to the Department of National Heritage to ring-fence lottery funding and to look at the totality of the problem with regard to capital costs and revenue implications in the longer term. I am suggesting that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State should address himself to that.

There needs to be a happy medium, which may mean a slower rate of infrastructure creation. A new generation of fine public buildings is all very well, but we need the quality of artistic performance to fill them with distinction. Similarly, I hope that the desirability of matching funding will not be too rigidly enforced. If it is, lottery funds will never reach some parts of the country, thus defeating what should be one of our objectives—to bring the arts within reach of all the people.

I need say little about the west end theatre, which remains a jewel in the crown of Britain's culture, but we should not forget the degree to which foreign visitors support it financially. Our actors, designers, writers and directors lead the way in musical theatre and drama, but we must remember how important it is to sustain the flow of overseas visitors to London by a positive attitude to tourism marketing. I shall discuss that later.

The position of the British film industry is perhaps slightly less satisfactory, but there are good grounds for optimism. We await the Government's review of the industry with the greatest interest. So soon after the 60th anniversary of Charles Laughton's first acting Oscar for Britain in 1933, it is appropriate to ask whether it is possible to revitalise the British film industry—after all, we should remember that cinema admissions in 1946 were 1.6 billion, and are now 113 million, albeit increasing by 15 per cent. in 1993. The answer must surely be yes.

It would require only a limited proportion of the lottery proceeds destined for the arts, channelled through the British Film Commission, to act as seedcorn for a revival of film-making in this country. We have the talent in acting, directing, and technical aspects to maintain a challenge for the Academy awards that is genuinely home based. Matching funding can be achieved with a more benign tax regime, and the seedcorn can then produce a harvest to match the palmy days of Alexander Korda and Ealing Studios. The recent success of "Four Weddings and a Funeral" should be enough to convince even the doubters what can be achieved.

Before discussing the prospects for British sport, I must mention the millennium fund, guidelines for the operation of which the Secretary of State set out in his speech this week, and draw to the House's attention the fact that London needs a new modern concert hall, preferably on the west side of the capital, to complement the Barbican in the east and the Royal Festival hall to the south. A building of suitable size, quality and accessibility would be an appropriate way to commemorate the millennium. I hope that such a proposal will emerge, just as the Royal Festival hall was a crowning achievement of the Festival of Britain in 1951. The new hall might even have a good acoustic.

Attendance at sporting events has been in general decline since the war, largely because television coverage of sport has become so pervasive and so good. New spectator sports have been created by television. Snooker and darts are two that come readily to mind, but the development of the instant replay camera has made armchair viewing and criticism of major sports such as football and cricket a far more attractive pastime.

In spite of that, stadiums in this country, especially in our cities, have been modernised, and new facilities to enhance growth sports such as athletics have been created in Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester and other cities. The football levy is helping to improve football grounds in the wake of the Hillsborough tragedy and the Taylor report, but there will be scope for further improving regional and local sporting facilities with the proceeds of the national lottery. It should be our aim to seek an overall improvement in British sporting achievement, and I hope that the Sports Council will think carefully about how that is to be done.

I especially hope that the general presumption in favour of capital schemes will not militate against investment in human capital. This country produces many fine sportsmen and sportswomen, whose talent cannot be nurtured to the fullest extent because of lack of funds. I propose the establishment of a scholarship fund from lottery proceeds to help develop those talents on which the next generation of sporting success will be based. As a nation, we need to win more gold medals, more world championships, than we do. The Christies, Gunnells and Jacksons are too few and far between, outstanding as their contribution to athletics has been.

It is also a tragedy that there is no British participation in this year's football world cup. Other countries invest heavily in their sporting future. Why not Britain?

The growing interest in keep fit classes, jogging and personal physical development, not to mention running and walking, is encouraging. Who could fail to be inspired by the sight of the annual London marathon getting under way? Yet I wonder whether we should be worried about the fact that, for many people, such a race is more about personal times than about winning or beating other people. The move away from competitive sport in some schools is deeply regrettable and I fully support the efforts of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State in that respect.

I mention to my hon. Friend, in passing, the possibility of inflation-indexing the Sports Council's financial memorandum guideline that requires Government approval for expenditure of more than £200,000 on capital works or £50,000 on policy research or monitoring. Those figures have not been increased since 1972 and now represent a restrictive curb on the council's activity.

The House should know that the Sports Council is extremely keen to foster excellence in UK sport. Through its £1.5 million grants to the National Coaching Foundation and through its support for sports science and sports medicine, it has done much to help sportspeople. Its

national junior sports programme will, if properly integrated in the national curriculum, help to improve the prospects of British success in many sports. I know that the House would wish me to add that the grant aid given to the Sports Council should in no way be affected by the future availability of lottery funds.

There was great disappointment that Manchester's Olympic bid was unsuccessful, in spite of the efforts of Sir Bob Scott and the Prime Minister. Even so, Britain continues to be regarded as a leading sporting nation, full of good ideas and programmes.

I have spoken about the need to match funds with the proceeds of the national lottery. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will now clarify the position of the private sector. Is the private sector to be allowed to contribute to partnership schemes that might, in time, offer a return on investment to the national lottery fund?

In the sport of tennis, for example, an organisation such as David Lloyd Leisure is keen to develop facilities, not just for profit, but because its founder hopes to find a future Wimbledon winner for Britain. Does the Minister want such a partnership to work in future? Can he assure me that he is committed to the principle that the participation of young people in active sport, both in and out of school, is high on his agenda?

We now have the means to provide the right facilities and we need the will to set them up. The figures suggest that more than half the population participate in some form of physical activity, but in organised participative sport the figures are much lower. That is the challenge which the House and the country should seek to meet.

In the debate on sport that I initiated last year, I talked about the huge potential for tourism offered by the Manchester Olympic bid. I have already referred to the importance of overseas visitors to the success of London theatres, and the same is true of many other sporting and artistic facilities in this country, as well as the nation's built and national heritage.

In 1993, tourists made 19.3 million visits to Britain, during the course of which a record £9.1 billion was spent. That makes Britain the sixth most popular tourist destination in the world, after the United States of America, France, Spain, Italy and Austria. Other countries are constantly amazed at the relatively small amount of money we spend on the promotion of Britain as a tourist destination.

The countries that I have mentioned spend far more than we do, as do many other countries that are far less attractive than ours. Germany outspends this country by five to one on overseas tourism promotion. Our limited commitment of public funds is justified on the ground that the tourism industry is so successful, but surely the question is whether public resources spent on advertising Britain in lucrative overseas markets would bring a return to the taxpayer.

The answer in other countries is a resounding yes, and we should not rest on our reputation when there are jobs to be created and revenue to be earned in return for a modest additional outlay. I propose that the Department of National Heritage, in conjunction with independent organisations such as the Institute of Travel and Tourism or the Tourism Society, should conduct an urgent study of other countries' rates of return on overseas promotional advertising.

Tourism stands to gain from four of the five elements of the national lottery's proceeds. I have already spoken about the arts and sport. The Millennium Commission will undoubtedly want to reflect on the international impact of the schemes that it will endorse. Similarly, the contribution of the lottery to the maintenance of our national heritage will be crucial to tourism.

The work of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England—the headquarters of which, I am pleased to say, is now in my constituency—and of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, which is known as English Heritage, does much to preserve and enhance the sort of Britain that visitors from the world come to see. The lottery can significantly enhance our ability to restore and preserve the built heritage of Britain, as well as its museums and galleries.

But what about those parts of the heritage that are still in private hands and are so excellently represented by the Historic Houses Association? Is the Minister willing to see funds made available to the owners of the great houses, castles and palaces of Britain on appropriate terms? If not, we may find ourselves contributing to a form of creeping nationalisation, which would be wrong.

I know that the Treasury has been reluctant to alter the tax regime to enable the owners of historic houses to maintain their properties more readily, but lottery proceeds could do much to overcome that handicap by adding to the £200 million per annum that the Department of National Heritage already spends.

I offer my congratulations to David Beaton and the staff of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency for the great progress that they have made in the past five years, when there have been steadily increasing visitor numbers and profitability. I hope that other visitor attractions will follow the excellent example of the Victoria and Albert museum and open for longer hours on Sundays. It is sad that an important national treasure house such as the national gallery does not open on bank holidays.

The contribution of tourism to our national heritage, arts and sport is enormous. The British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board are constantly engaged in the task of promoting events in Britain to potential overseas visitors. The London arts season in February and March of this year was marketed in Germany, Spain, Japan, the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Italy, Ireland, the Nordic countries and Switzerland at an overall cost of £1.25 million.

Visitor inquiries and numbers were dramatically influenced by that expenditure and the latest estimate, which can as yet be merely anecdotal, is that many millions of pounds of extra business came to London as a result of the outlay of £1.25 million.

With more resources, much more could have been achieved, but I pay tribute to the fact that the British Tourist Authority has been able to recycle money—as much as £1 million—to overseas promotions in the past year. That has made an enormous difference to the number of inquiries coming to BTA offices in North America, where the increase in inquiries has been as much as one third—from 750,000 to 1 million in the past year.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as his speech has been such a thoughtful tour d'horizon of the tourist industry. Will he consider the total resources that we spend, via the British Tourist Association and individual tourist boards?

Will he consider the fact that the BTA promotes British industry in, for example, Boston in the United States, while

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

the Wales tourist board promotes Wales? Would it not be better for the British Tourist Association to promote the United Kingdom? It is important that visitors come to the United Kingdom—it does not matter where within it. Will my hon. Friend consider whether our resources are being spent as wisely as possible?

Mr. Coombs: I have the greatest sympathy with what my hon. Friend sayhs. He is right; we should be in the business of promoting the United Kingdom plc in any way that we can. I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is keenly aware of that, as we have debated it more than once. I was proposing to spare him another onslaught on that issue this morning, partly in the interests of allowing one or two other hon. Members to participate in the debate before 2.30 pm.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) will forgive me, I shall not go into that subject in detail. If he has the chance to make his own speech, he can press the Minister on how best to promote all the United Kingdom, not just England —or, indeed, London—to those lucrative overseas markets that I mentioned, in the far east, America and some of the emerging nations elsewhere.

The London arts season has been a tremendous success as a result of the extra finance provided by the BTA and the ETB. The opening of the channel tunnel offers the prospect of a huge increase in visitor numbers. We can make a parallel with the case of Austria, where the recent changes in eastern Europe have resulted in the opening of the borders with the east—the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary. That led Austria to leap up the international visitors' table from seventh to fifth place in four years. I have no doubt that the opening of the channel tunnel gives this country the best opportunity in a century to increase the numbers of visitors to these shores.

We need to encourage visitors to travel beyond London, to discover the other England which has so much to offer: a friendly welcome and, possibly, less congestion. Tourism in Britain will benefit from continuing improvements in road and rail links, from more budget-priced hotels and from a greater willingness by those in the industry to learn and speak the languages of our visitors—especially French, German and Japanese.

A well-trained work force must be the central focus of Government policy in the next few years if Britain is to sustain its share of world tourism. The "welcome host" customer service training scheme, developed by the national tourist boards, should be supported by every training and enterprise council in the land.

The Minister will not be surprised to hear me say that there remains a strong case for giving more help to the private sector in the form of grant aid. Almost all the resources disbursed by the Department of National Heritage go to public sector bodies; the private sector benefits only indirectly.

Grants given under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 offered useful assistance to the private sector, but have now been discontinued. Small hotels and boarding houses benefited from extra bathrooms and renovations in a way that is no longer possible, yet the need still exists. If one or two of my hon. Friends who represent seaside resorts manage to catch the Chair's eye later today, I am sure that they will want to emphasise that point strongly.

The whole industry would welcome any sign from the Minister that he is sympathetic to this point. After all, such small establishments continue to bear the brunt of the excessive regulation which the Minister is pledged to reduce and of the anti-competitive effect of VAT at 17.5 per cent., which hoteliers and others feel puts them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their rivals in other European countries, where the tax is as low as 5 per cent.

The vast potential of the British tourist industry needs to be more effectively recognised by the Government. The industry repeatedly calls for a designated Minister for tourism, but a clearer sign of the Government's understanding would be a commitment to additional funding for overseas promotion, stimulation of more holiday taking by the British in Britain and more help for the widely fragmented private sector—the small, self-employing businesses on which the industry significantly depends. There is no more exciting challenge for the Department.

During the short lifetime of the Department of National Heritage, the many different bodies under its aegis have been drawn together. Links between regional tourist boards and regional Sports Council offices have been encouraged. In the west country, the tourist board has produced joint strategy policy statements with the Sports Council south-west, South-west Arts and the area museums council. Other regional bodies have followed that lead. Similarly, the access initiative has been developing ways in which more people can gain access to sports and leisure facilities.

I have heard criticism of the mere fact of the existence of the Department of National Heritage, but the evidence is clear: it is beginning to make a worthwhile impact in a number of areas by acting as a catalyst and by making the sum greater than its parts. The advent of the lottery proceeds will be the greatest shot in the arm that United Kingdom leisure has had in 100 years—if we use them wisely.

I should like to think that a major policy objective for the future will be the promotion of active sport, and of participation in sport and the arts by a much larger proportion of the population. I hope that the Minister will feel able to respond positively to the suggestions that I have made on this and other matters, and that, ultimately, the whole nation will benefit from this Department's important work.

10.24 am

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in this important debate. Unfortunately, I have important engagements later in my constituency. As my hon. Friends know, I am punctilious about ensuring that I look after my constituents' interests. I, therefore, apologise to the House for the fact that I shall have to leave in a couple of hours' time.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Does my hon. Friend intend to speak for that long?

Mr. Banks: I shall try to leave my hon. Friend a little time in which to make his own speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), in an excellent and thorough speech, rightly referred to the statistics that show that 19.3 million visitors spent about £9.1 billion in Britain and that Britain is the sixth most visited country in the world. All too often, our leisure and tourism industries are not given the credit that they deserve, but they are a vital source of employment for many people and they are important to our balance of payments. Those industries rank high among the top 10 employers in the British Isles.

I wish to refer to several of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon. I agree with what he said about section 4 grants and I hope that the Minister will feel able to express some sympathy with my hon. Friend's comments. I certainly think it unfair that the leisure industries of Scotland and Wales have been able to take advantage of those grants for quite some time now, whereas hoteliers south of the border have not. I understand the reasons behind the decision to discontinue the grants some time ago; nevertheless, I think that no area of the United Kingdom should be disadvantaged in the way that England is.

My hon. Friend referred to the importance of transport links with the tourism areas and resorts of this country and I agreed with what he said about them. Recently, the Secretary of State for Transport made an announcement about the roads programme. I was pleased to note that some of the road schemes might have dropped off the Department's list, but did not, were links with tourist resorts. I was especially pleased that the Scarisbrick and Pinfold bypass linking my constituency with the national motorway network remains in the programme.

I welcomed my hon. Friend's comments about reappointing a Minister with specific responsibility for tourism. I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State, who has had to look after a long list of responsibilities since arriving at the Department. I am convinced that it would be possible to remove a Minister from the Department of Trade and Industry and send him or her to the Department of National Heritage. Two Ministers are not enough to look after the diverse portfolios at the Department of National Heritage.

I know that the Minister had a useful meeting recently in Aberdeen with the British Resorts Association. Hon. Members will know that the BRA's headquarters is in my constituency of Southport. I should like to touch on some of the issues raised at the BRA's last meeting because that important body helps to engender greater co-operation between the Government, local authorities and the private sector. Such co-operation is becoming paramount and I hope to give one or two examples of how it is promoting tourism and will lead to further important developments in tourism infrastructure throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that, for the first time in the distribution to local authorities via the standard spending assessment system, specific reference has been made to the number of day visitors and that that is helping areas such as his and mine which receive large numbers of tourists?

Mr. Banks: That is my first substantive point and I am about to deal with it. My hon. Friend is entirely right and I welcome the introduction of an allowance for day visitors in the standard spending assessment for local authorities. That is long overdue and Conservative Members welcome it. It is time to lay down a marker for the SSA because it is not a case of thus far and no more. We need to look at the definition of a day visitor; that is crucial to the issue that my hon. Friend mentions. I support a formula increase from one sixth to one third of a resident for 1995. I also want to see a tighter definition of the term "day visitor", because that will aid British resorts.

The BRA lobbied the Minister on that issue on 17 June, when it made it clear that it would be prepared to provide supporting statistics, costs and information. I have every confidence that the information that it provides will not fall on deaf ears and I look forward in the not-too-distant future to an increase from one sixth towards one third for which local authority representatives and others have been asking.

One of the greatest concerns of some of my hon. Friends who are in the Chamber relates to hotels changing to hostels. My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) has expressed concern about the issues of Department of Social Security money being limited, the number of people who stay in our resorts and the changing nature of our resorts. I am reminded that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), who is in his place, and some of my other hon. Friends take a similar view.

We need a clearer definition of the word "hostel" and hostels must have a proper licensing scheme to ensure that standards of management, safety and insurance are improved. I do not propose to develop that theme now, because to do so would take us wide of the matter under discussion. However, I have put down a marker to the effect that it is vital not to allow, by default, the nature of our tourist resorts to change.

Mr. Sykes: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. He is not straying wide of the matter being debated, because the preservation of our resorts as jewels is important to the leisure industry. I, therefore, urge him to continue on that line.

Mr. Banks: It is difficult to refuse such an invitation and I know that if I stray wide of the mark you will bring me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend will shortly have an opportunity to make his own speech and deal with the issues that are important to him. I shall tackle those that I wish to deal with. I hope that the Minister will support the marker that I have laid down, although I dare say that there will be some resistance, especially from the Department of Employment, to my suggestions on planning and licensing.

Two areas of concern are the single regeneration budget and European reconstruction and development funding. It is right to express concern about the failure to recognise the economic value and impact of tourism projects. The evaluation process for those funds has been too heavily weighted in favour of industrial rather than tourism projects. I hope that the Minister will exert pressure, as I do, on his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment to adjust the selection criteria to give tourism projects a better chance of success. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon said, tourism and leisure provide a considerable number of jobs and, hitherto, the industry has not been given the credit that it deserves as a major employer.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Would my hon. Friend care to suggest to the hon. Member for Redcar

[Mr. Harold Elletson]

(Ms Mowlam) that she should talk to the Labour group in the European Parliament, which has consistently opposed tourism being classified for objective 5b status? Is that not disgraceful?

Mr. Banks: I agree with my hon. Friend. The hon. Lady, who is in her place on the Opposition Front Bench, will have heard his comments and I hope that she will act positively on them. We recently had European elections. The Labour MEP who has represented Merseyside, West for some years, managed to drop into my seaside resort constituency, which is in his constituency, for the first time in about a couple of years when no elections were taking place. I regret the total lack of interest in tourism of some socialists in the European Parliament. Tourism is undervalued and it is time that they did something about that.

I hope that the Minister will agree that the industry bias should be changed slightly so that tourism and tourist projects will have a better chance of success. I hope that, as I have suggested, he will press other Departments to change the evaluation process for tourism bids and recognise that such projects have a significant impact not just on my resort, but on others throughout the United Kingdom.

For different reasons, the quality of bathing water is an important and sensitive subject. My hon. Friends and colleagues in the leisure industry will stress the importance of there being no delay in the private water companies pressing ahead with their programmes with the utmost vigour so as to satisfy the requirements of the European Union directive. I know that the Minister also wishes to see that happen.

It is significant that, since the advent of privatisation, North West Water plc in my part of the world, in the north-west, has been able to find the necessary £85 million to reinvest in a new sewerage system which will prevent sewage drifting out into the Irish sea on days when there is heavy rain. That investment work is almost complete and will mean a significant improvement in bathing water quality in Southport and surrounding beaches. It is important to stress that many beaches, especially in my area of the north-west, are particularly clean and the Ainsdale beach received a Tidy Britain award last year. I know that Ministers have agreed with the British Resorts Association that we should continue to be active in that respect and I welcome the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Minister that there should be regular, possibly thrice-yearly, meetings with representatives of the BRA in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon mentioned the national lottery. I agree very much with his comments about the advisory board and I especially liked his idea of a scholarship fund. We want to see more of the Christies, the Gunnells and the Coes, as he suggested. Did I say Coes? Perhaps I should have said Jacksons, but my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) certainly deserves mention, too. The Minister has stated in the past that tourism projects would not be eligible for money from the national lottery. However, I hope that when he replies to the debate he will take the opportunity to make it clear, as I believe that he should, that it will be possible for projects such as those in the arts, for cultural or sporting matters, or for built environment projects such as the renovation of historic piers such as the one in my constituency of Southport, to benefit from money from the national lottery. It is important that my hon. Friend the Minister should draw up advice and guidance for the national lottery to encourage applications that would have an important tourism impact.

I should also like to comment on compulsory competitive tendering for entertainment services in local authorities. While I can see advantages in compulsory competitive tendering—certainly in a number of areas on which the Government have embarked in recent years, which has led to greater efficiency and services being provided at less cost to the council tax payer—it is now time that my hon. Friend and other Ministers made clear their intentions as to whether there is a timetable. If there is a timetable, what is it and how do the Government intend to proceed on the matter? What is the latest position? Shall we be legislating on the issue? That is important and local authority representatives would welcome advice on it.

My hon. Friends have already mentioned the question of tax. I am very much aware that, right across the board, Britain's hoteliers are subjected to a 17.5 per cent. tax regime. In other countries in the European Union, there are varying taxes affecting different parts of the industry. While I recognise that we are unlikely to be able to reduce particular taxes, if only because of European law, I hope that it will be possible for my hon. Friend the Minister to join me in expressing the view that we should not add to the existing tax burden on the tourism and leisure industry and that we especially do not want a tourism or bed tax.

I know that a number of my hon. Friends wish to catch your eye this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall draw my remarks to a close. In so doing, I shall highlight what I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks: the importance of partnership between Government,the private sector and local authorities. My constituency of Southport is a classic example of what can be achieved if there is a positive framework of co-operation. I am delighted that during the time I have been a Member of Parliament the Southport sea front redevelopment proposals have pressed ahead with the utmost vigour. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, some £310,000 of pump-priming money got that multi-million pound project off the ground. That shows what can be done, and I know that some of my hon. Friends also bat very hard for their constituencies. We received the £310,000 for Southport from the urban partnership fund. Although my constituency is part of an authority in the inner area, the constituency itself is not and, as my hon. Friend the Minister knows, a considerable amount of arm-twisting went on behind the scenes and I am especially grateful for his support and the support of Ministers in other Departments.

I hope that we shall be able to see further Government support for the development of the much-needed sea wall defences in Southport, because without it we shall not be able to see the important public-private sector initiative of the Redelco plc development, which is vital to the future of Southport. I pay tribute to Mr. Phil King, who was chairman of the officers advisory group of the BRA and is manager of the tourism and attractions department of the metropolitan borough of Sefton; he is based in my constituency and has done sterling work, as have his colleagues in the BRA.

The debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon is a vital opportunity to which we should all contribute. I regret that, with the exception of the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), there are no other

Labour Members and no Liberal Democrats in the Chamber to contribute to the debate. However, looking around the Conservative side, I am delighted to see that British resorts and the city of Chester are represented and that my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) are also here to bat for the British leisure industry.

10.46 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks): Opposition Members are all in Wimbledon enjoying the sunshine.

I am grateful to be called in this important debate and especially to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), who gave a well-versed and well-thought-out speech, and my wise hon. Friend the Member for Southport. My constituency is well known to hon. Members. When I first became the Member for Scarborough in 1992, I was pleased to note how many hon. Members knew that Scarborough was England's first resort. In a host of ways, our town remains so, although our local economy has diversified. Apart from its craggy 45-mile coastline, we may all also boast some of England's finest countryside—the wild, rugged North Yorkshire moors and the valleys forged millions of years ago by ice-age glaciers, which left in their wake the notoriously unstable boulder clay on which the unfortunate Holbeck Hall hotel foundered a year ago.

Scarborough and Whitby are thriving towns and world-class resorts and the leisure industry forms a major component of our livelihood. People choose particular holiday destinations partly according to whether they are easy to reach. That is exactly how it has always been. Our Victorian and Edwardian ancestors knew that the considerable charms of Scarborough and Whitby were within easy reach by virtue of the most up-to-date communication system that human ingenuity had devised —the railway. With royal patronage, too, my constituency prospered and continues to prosper to this day because of the railway.

I attach the greatest importance to the railways. The Esk valley railway is not only a link to Whitby for surrounding villages, but a link for Teessiders and Tynesiders intent on having a good holiday. I am vice-president of the North Yorkshire Moors railway and I yearn for the day when, instead of stopping altogether at Grosmont, the trains continue into Whitby and bring with them an extra 300,000 visitors a year. I acknowledge, too, the importance to Scarborough of the service to York, to West Riding and to Manchester airport and beyond. There are 17 trains a day during the season—except, of course, when it suits the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. One can only guess at the precise effect that the two strikes so far have had on the leisure industry, those whose holidays were disgracefully disrupted and the nation at large. We can only wonder at the posturing of Opposition Members caught with their trousers down, so to speak, in the midst of probably the most boring leadership election in parliamentary history. Perhaps they are in need of counselling, like many of their febrile colleagues in the BBC—or perhaps not.

Perhaps one should refer instead to last Friday's *Hansard* to obtain a clue. By chance, I have a copy with me. An important debate on competitiveness was in full spate—a subject as vital to the leisure industry as any other. I questioned Labour's Front-Bench spokesman—who, incidentally, prefers to be known as a spokesperson —on the rail strike, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler). The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) made a brilliant response. I pay tribute to him. He told the House in one sentence Labour's new industrial and leisure policy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is beginning to stray. I shall be grateful if he will stick to the subject of the debate.

Mr. Sykes: I am guided by your wise advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, perhaps the House would be interested to know how Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen viewed the rail strike, because, as he knows, communications are important to the leisure industry.

Ms Mowlam: I am female.

Mr. Sykes: Can I coax the hon. Lady out of her closet?

Ms Mowlam: I am not in a closet. I am seated on the Front Bench.

Mr. Sykes: It remains the case that Labour Members are timorous supplicants to the trade union movement.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) says that she is female. Does she now wish to be referred to as "a spoke"—like "a chair?"

Ms Mowlam *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us proceed with the debate in a serious way.

Mr. Sykes: Fortunately, these days the railway is not the only means of transport. The A64 is one of the principal routes to Scarborough and Whitby, along which the majority of our visitors travel. It is a bad road, being busy and dangerous. For much of its length past York, it is single carriageway. I will share with the House the experience of holidaymakers during the Whitsun bank holiday. The *Scarborough Evening News* reported:

"About 6.30 pm yesterday, Radio 5 Live singled out just two roads to avoid—the A64 and the A1 in North Yorkshire.

AA Roadwatch said cars were stacked up all morning from York to Scarborough, and then again for more than four hours in the opposite direction last night.

Among the worst-hit areas was Whitwell-on-the-Hill, where traffic was reduced to a virtual standstill during much of the evening."

Since the 1930s, the authorities have planned to upgrade that road to a modern dual carriageway. It was believed that a scheme was imminent and a preferred route in place, until the Department of Transport put it on the back burner.

I want that road, and I want it as soon as possible, not just because I am the constituency's Member of Parliament but because I am a manufacturer in the area; I declare my interest in that regard. I discovered that the Department has three possible reasons for delaying the scheme—environmental, economic and strategic. My hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic is also the Member of Parliament for Salisbury, so I was able to reassure him on environmental grounds—that no Stonehenge straddles the preferred route and that no colony of lesser-crested newts or of Greenham common women nests there to prostrate themselves before the excavators and halt progress.

[Mr. Sykes]

Having satisfied myself on environmental grounds, I looked for economic reasons for delaying the scheme, but in vain. The preferred route is efficient. Much of it travels through the Vale of Pickering, which is level ground—a construction engineer's idea of heaven throughout the ages. It shadows the 19th-century railway that gave Scarborough its present-day prosperity.

The cost to the community of accidents—quite apart from the immeasurable loss of human life itself—is huge and would pay for two of the major schemes in one section alone in two years. The construction of that road would improve and sustain the wealth-creating and, by implication, tax-paying manufacturing, service and leisure sectors, which are already a considerable source of employment on the east coast.

That has already been recognised by the European Community, through our objective 5b status, thanks to Edward McMillan-Scott, our newly re-elected MEP. A number of my hon. Friends have also played their part. The dualling of the two sections would represent good value for money.

Having ruled out environmental and economic objections, I was left with strategic objections. Scarborough and Whitby are world-class resorts with their own economies which depend not only on tourism but on manufacturing, service industries, fishing, farming and people who wish to enjoy their retirement. We must compete for our customers with the best of the rest. We do not mind that—in fact, we thrive on it.

I decided to consider how Scarborough and Whitby compared strategically with other resorts. I took an up-to-date road map and made a survey of all major resorts in England and Wales, comparing their proximity to a dual carriageway or motorway. I tabulated them, starting with the nearest and ending with the resort farthest away. I was astonished and upset by the result.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) will be pleased to hear that Blackpool was at the top of the list. It is nil miles from the nearest dual carriageway, as are Brighton, Bournemouth, Colwyn Bay, Conwy and Margate. Cleethorpes is only two miles from a dual carriageway. Ramsgate, Bognor Regis, Morecambe, Clacton-on-Sea, Southport and Eastbourne are all within easy reach of one. Last night, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) told me that Eastbourne has just been given £25 million by the Department of Transport to upgrade the main road right to his back door. Imagine how upset I was to read that Scarborough shared joint bottom place with Minehead and Ilfracombe in its proximity to a major motorway network—40 miles away from the nearest continuous dual carriageway. England's fourth most important resort shares joint bottom place with Ilfracombe, which has a population of 9,000.

Mr. Fabricant: As my hon. Friend knows, I have experienced the road from York to Scarborough a number of times. Its status is most unfortunate, as Scarborough is a beautiful area to visit. Does my hon. Friend agree that Yorkshire in general is disadvantaged in its roads system? Perhaps that is the reason why fewer visitors come to Yorkshire and why tourism is centred more on the south of England.

Mr. Sykes: People will visit Yorkshire for many reasons, not least for the welcome and hospitality that greet them when they arrive. Many people think that we have a good road system, and we do—I just wish that that particular scheme could be brought forward. My constituents can knock spots off the competition. As we approach the 21st century, road usage is bound to leap, regardless of what the "antis" say, so time is not on our side. Even if the Government gave it the green light today, the new road could not be used until 2005. I do not begrudge any hon. Member a road scheme, but it has been galling to hear a number of hon. Members complain about schemes proposed for their constituencies. I beg my hon. Friend the Minister to persuade the Government to reconsider the case for an early start on the dualling of the A64.

Mr. Matthew Banks: While I am deeply envious that Scarborough has considerable rail links to Manchester airport, which Southport does not, I feel that I must point out that my hon. Friend's genuine modesty forbids him from telling us that, as a result of considerable lobbying on his part, the scheme to which he referred has not completely dropped off the Department of Transport's programme. The dual carriageway will be constructed as a result of my hon. Friend's pressure, if not as quickly as he would like.

Mr. Sykes: At the same time that parts of my constituency are disappearing, I am glad to agree with my hon. Friend that the scheme itself has not entirely disappeared but has perhaps been put off. As a Member of Parliament, I regard it as important to do my best to ensure that road is built sooner rather than later.

One reason for one's choice of holiday destination is whether or not it is easy to reach. Another reason why visitors come to Scarborough and Whitby is quite simply that my constituency is a nice place to visit. The hoteliers and landladies are renowned for their hospitality and the warmth of their welcome—even for Lancastrians. They work long hours in the service of their guests and are always cheerful. There is plenty to do and much family fun to be had, along with the best possible value for money.

Incomparable scenery and a remarkable heritage combine to povide a holiday to suit all tastes. It is possible to sail from Whitby and see little that one's 19th-century counterpart would not have seen. Captain Cook set sail from Whitby in the 18th century to discover Australia; if the health and safety people had been around then, he would still be in Whitby harbour today.

The Yorkshire Television series "Heartbeat"—a wonderful programme—is set in the glorious North Yorkshire moors. As the *Yorkshire Post* reported only yesterday, the area is achieving world fame among tourists and film crews alike. Let me make a special plea for the authorities to try their best to preserve the village of Goathland—known as Aidensfield in the programme—by ensuring that the best parking facilities for our visitors, and the quality of life for those who live there, are preserved.

Another issue that has caused us some concern for the future is the gradual emergence of badly run DSS hostels.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): My hon. Friend sang the praises of Scarborough without mentioning the Stephen Joseph theatre and the contribution of Alan Ayckbourn. That is a marvellous example of a regional theatre's contributing not only to local culture but to

national culture, and to the international reputation of this country. Although that is true of many of our theatres, the Stephen Joseph theatre in Scarborough is a prime example.

Mr. Sykes: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Early one fine February morning, I was privileged to be able to take the Select Committee on National Heritage —of which I am a member—to Scarborough. We went to the top of Olivers Mount and, on that cold February day, we had a magnificent view of the town and all its beauties. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot possibly list all the beauties of my constituency today: our business is due to finish at about 2.30 pm and I do not wish to detain the House.

I was talking about DSS hostels, which have already been mentioned—badly run DSS hostels, that is; many are well run. My constituency contains few such hostels, but the behaviour of some tenants in the badly run ones has put tourists off. Neighbouring hotels have then had to consider whether to convert themselves to that type of accommodation, and a vicious circle was in the making.

Along with my good and hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North, I did my best to bring the problem to the attention of the powers that be. I pay special tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, and for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the Minister for Local Government and Planning, for the considerable efforts that they put into gaining a satisfactory response to our representations.

Planning permission is now required. For my part, I must say that the level of complaints has subsided; we must ensure that the current sensible regulation stays in place. In order to deal with existing hostels, the Government announced that they would consider a licensing scheme to give tenants the same standard of safe accommodation that is available elsewhere. That is indeed welcome news. One of the requirements is fire safety—as we know to our cost in Scarborough.

I understand that the owner of that particular hostel had no public liability insurance. Such insurance is a legal requirement for a hotel, but not for a hostel. I suggest that owners who appear to be contriving tenancies to give themselves a relatively easy income from housing benefit should be required to insure themselves and their tenants in a similar way to hoteliers.

The action taken by the Government so far has helped to ensure that England's greatest resorts have a prosperous future. As Member of Parliament for two of England's greatest jewels, I am grateful for that. I do not accept the trendy, untenable notion that seaside resorts are done for in England. Next year, my constituency will celebrate having returned Members of Parliament to Westminster for 700 years. When I am no longer Member of Parliament for Scarborough—by the people's choice or my own—I hope to leave it as the holidaymaker's first choice: a place where the elderly can retire in peace and enjoyment, where business continues to succeed and, above all, where young school leavers find opportunities and are able to prosper like the generations who have gone before them.

11.3 am

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes). I congratulate him on his thorough speech and the points that he raised about tourism and coastal resorts. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on managing to secure a debate on this important subject. He dealt with it in a detailed and comprehensive way, demonstrating the importance of the leisure industry to the United Kingdom's economy as a whole.

I must add—I know that my hon. Friends will agree with me—that I find it extraordinary that, apart from the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), no Opposition Members are present. The hon. Lady sits in splendid isolation, but in isolation none the less. She was joined briefly by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks); I did not know whether to feel pleased for the hon. Lady, or sorry that he had had to come and help. A grey-bearded old Liberal came in for a short time, but he has now disappeared—heaven knows where.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon pointed out, the leisure industry accounts for £80 billion a year —the entire social security budget. It is shocking that no Opposition Member except the hon. Member for Redcar should be present to take part in the debate. People living in major tourist resorts that depend substantially on the leisure industry—such as Scarborough, Southport and Blackpool—will note that, and will particularly note the hypocrisy of the Liberal party. Its Members, who so often pretend to be the friends of the tourism and leisure industries, now cannot even be bothered to turn up.

Mr. Matthew Banks: May I clarify a point of detail? Presumably my hon. Friend is referring to the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal party is a separate party, whose national headquarters are in my constituency and which was far too sensible to merge with the Social Democratic party.

Mr. Elletson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is quite right: I was, of course, referring to the Liberal Democrats, not to the Literal Democrats or any other flavour of Liberalism. I apologise for using shorthand of that kind. No doubt it is an example of the abuse of language to which my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon referred so convincingly, and which we should all try to avoid.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon demonstrated, the leisure industry emcompasses an enormous variety of sectors: music, including opera, sport and, of course, tourism. My hon. Friend examined some of them in detail, particularly sport. He mentioned the Manchester Olympic bid. I hope that all hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Minister, join me in hoping that although Manchester lost on this occasion, it will persist in its attempt to become the world's Olympic city and will receive the full, unqualified backing of the British Government next time. Let us hope that it will be third time lucky for Manchester.

I do not want to cover the ground covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon as comprehensively as he did. I wish to deal specifically with one aspect of the leisure industry: tourism, which was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon explained how important the industry is to the economy. Tourism alone accounts for 4 per cent. of gross domestic product. It employs about 1.5 million people, accounting for 10 per cent. of the national work force. It is now the second

[Mr. Elletson]

biggest industry in the United Kingdom: £25 billion a year is spent on tourism and there were 18 million foreign visitors in 1992.

Over the past 10 years, employment in the tourism industry has grown by 28 per cent., compared with employment growth of just 1 per cent. in the country generally. Around the world, one person in 15 is involved in the industry, and it accounts for 6 per cent. of world GDP. It is, therefore, a massive and very important industry, which is growing year by year and which offers tremendous opportunity for job creation in this country and worldwide. Its importance is fully recognised by the Minister. My hon. Friends and I recognise that he is truly a friend of tourism and that, in the past year, he has fought some major and important battles on behalf of the industry. I thank him for the work that he has done on behalf of my constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) discussed Department of Social Security hostels, an issue of particular concern to his and my constituents and to people living in coastal resorts throughout the country. It may be difficult for people from other areas to understand the scale of the decay that has developed in the United Kingdom's major tourist resorts in the past 10 years as a result of the unregulated and uncontrolled influx of DSS benefit claimants into coastal resorts. That has had a shocking effect on the tourist industry and on people's quality of life in those areas.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough, I have received hundreds of letters of complaint about the sudden overnight establishment of DSS hostels in tourist and residential areas. We have heard a constantly repeated range of complaints about people urinating in the streets, swearing, drinking and taking drugs. The problem appears to be almost universally swamping people in coastal areas, which is shocking. It has greatly contributed to the decline of the quality of our resorts.

I am delighted that the Minister has taken the problem seriously and that he has done his best to fight a battle within Government to ensure that the Department of the Environment took up the case and agreed to introduce legislation.

Mr. Sykes: Does my hon. Friend consider it important that we had thought that the problem might have been confined to relatively few resorts, including Scarborough and Whitby, but that, as a result of conducting a survey of England's major resorts, which included the advice of my hon. Friends representing those resorts, we found out the true extent and nature of the dreadful problem?

Mr. Elletson: That is right. Like my hon. Friend, I was grateful to our hon. Friends and colleagues who contributed to that survey, which showed the scale of the problem across the country. The Department of Environment has sought to tackle it temporarily by changing the use classes order, which will mean that planning permission will be required for hostels. That will, however, deal only with problems arising in the future, not with the problem that exists now.

My hon. Friend is right to say that a licensing system is the long-term answer to the problem. I know that we shall be able to count on the Minister's support in pushing for the establishment of that system as quickly as possible. He does not underestimate the scale of the problem and the damage that it is doing to tourist resorts.

Like some of my hon. Friends, I have been slightly critical of the role of the Department of National Heritage in the tourism and leisure industry. It has seemed slightly unfocused and not fully aware of the extent to which it is an industrial Ministry. The Minister understands that, and regards his role primarily as that of an industrial Minister who is running a Department responsible for one of the largest industries in this country. He has an important role in co-ordinating attempts to assist the industry to develop in the best way that it can and to recognise the opportunities available across the spectrum of Government responsibility. That is a massive task.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) mentioned transport and its effects on tourism. Day by day, we see environment problems that affect the tourism industry. The quality of life is bound up with people's enjoyment of their leisure time and the leisure industry.

We have had a problem in Blackpool and other tourist resorts with the quality of our bathing waters. I am delighted that the Minister has taken that issue seriously and that he has sought to ensure that the European Community and European Commissioners were not able to ban bathing off British beaches, which would have been entirely unnecessary and done a great deal of damage to the British tourist industry.

The local Labour party in Lancashire behaved in a grossly irresponsible manner in that matter. I was delighted that the ban has not been imposed and that we shall be able to move peacefully and successfully towards ensuring that our bathing waters meet European standards by 1996, which has been made possible by the amount of money that North West Water has invested in a new sewage treatment plant based at Fleetwood, which would not have been possible under the old regime.

Mr. Sykes: Does my hon. Friend agree that England's bathing waters are among the finest in the world and that some of our European partners—or so-called partners—apart from not obeying their own laws, do not obey the European directives and are well known for cheating on tests, for which we are so castigated in this country?

Mr. Elletson: I agree with my hon. Friend. I know that we can count on the Minister to ensure that the Department of the Environment monitors thoroughly the appalling abuses that take place in countries such as Italy and Greece, which are so quick and ready to criticise British resorts and the quality of British waters, without paying attention to the shocking state of affairs that exists in their resorts.

The tourist industry offers huge opportunities for job creation and economic growth. We must examine ways in which we can assist that potential. I am sure that all Conservative Members believe in backing genuine winners. We believe not in propping up lame duck industries but in assisting profitable, successful industries to become even more profitable and successful, and to employ even more people.

Tourism in Britain is a growing, winning industry. It recorded an average growth of 7 per cent. between 1980 and 1990. Unfortunately, that compares with 15 per cent. growth in the United States of America, 9 per cent. growth

in Italy and 10 per cent. growth in Spain. We have to ask ourselves what they are doing to support tourism that we are not but could be doing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon touched on some of the issues that we should deal with. He was right to suggest that we should reinstate section 4 tourism development grants, which no longer exist. Although he did not mention it, I know that he is fully aware of the fact that it is only in England that they no longer exist. That is an iniquitous and unjust feature of the present system: they exist in Scotland and in Wales, but not in England.

Mr. Brandreth: I have always been reasonably persuaded by the argument that there are different states of maturity in the different parts of the United Kingdom, in terms of tourism, which justify the imbalance in investment between Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and England. I know that some people—my hon. Friend is obviously one—take a different view.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would elaborate a little more on why he thinks that there is no justification in the argument that there is a maturity in the English tourist industry. It has been there longer, and it is self-evidently more thriving, than the industry in other parts of the country, such as those that are slightly more remote from the major airports. Will my hon. Friend explore that point a little more?

Mr. Elletson: I shall be delighted to do that, because my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) is himself a very mature and distinguished Member of Parliament. As a Parliamentary Private Secretary, he is a member of the Treasury team. It is delightful that he can join us this morning and hear something of the importance of the tourist industry to the Treasury.

Of course there are differences in the maturity of the tourist industry throughout the United Kingdom. However, the present system does not take account of the relative maturity of different sectors of the tourist industry within Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England; for example, we do not take account of the relative lack of provision for disabled tourists. We can do nothing for them here. No grants are available in England for projects that might assist the development of tourism by disabled people. That problem could be addressed, however, because funds are available, in Scotland and Wales.

We must look at the question seriously. I do not think that it is a reasonable argument to say that Scotland and Wales are less mature or to say that because a particular project lies 10 miles across the Solway firth, it should find that massive funding is available from central Government. In a united kingdom, that argument does not work.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Is my hon. Friend saying—if so, I very much agree—that there is no difference of maturity between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland? It seems to be just a matter of the Welsh Office, the Scottish Office and the Northern Ireland Office having taken a decision that has not been taken in England.

Mr. Elletson: Yes, that is right. Those are the advantages that the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish have —and which they are extremely lucky to have. We in England do not have those advantages. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester, a member of the Treasury team, will consider that point seriously, and will consider the return of section 4 development grants in the next Budget. I assure them that that would be one of the most popular moves that they could make in tourist resorts, including my hon. Friend's own very distinguished, very important and popular tourist resort of Chester.

Mr. Brandreth: Of course every tourist resort would welcome any support that it can get. What is interesting is that, although the city of Chester, which borders Wales, does not get the additional help given to north Wales to promote itself, its attractions are so great that, even without that support, it flourishes. The tourist industry in Chester is mature and is helping itself. It thrives, flourishes and grows at an even greater pace than the areas that are getting help.

Mr. Elletson: I take my hon. Friend's point, but I believe that Chester has so much to offer, that there is so much more that Chester could do and that there are so many ways in which Chester could continue to grow. I would hesitate to say that it was fully mature.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the great treasures of Chester is its Member of Parliament?

Mr. Elletson: I certainly agree. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester is little short of a national institution.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): He should certainly be in one.

Mr. Elletson: I am sure that, if my hon. Friend were in an institution, he would join many Opposition Members.

As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester is here this morning, and as he is a member of the Treasury team, I want to draw another issue to his attention, which many of my hon. Friends also wish to emphasise. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon raised the question of VAT rates on some of our tourist attractions. My hon. Friend the Minister will be well aware of this issue, which tourist attractions and leisure parks have taken up with him.

It is clearly ludicrous that we have such a wide range of different rates of VAT on the various tourist attractions, hotels and restaurants throughout the European Community. It may be difficult to remove VAT, or to lower the rate of VAT once it has been levied, without totally changing the system at European level, and without a new European directive. However, I hope that the Minister will take the matter seriously and that he will ensure that we continue to fight this battle on Europe.

The variations in VAT levels throughout the European Community are astonishing. VAT on hotel accommodation is levied at 6 per cent. in Belgium, 5.5 per cent. in France and 3 per cent. in Luxembourg, but at 17.5 per cent. in the United Kingdom, 15 per cent. in Germany and 25 per cent. in Denmark.

VAT on hotel and restaurant meals is levied at 20.5 per cent. in Belgium, 18 per cent. in France, 16 per cent. in Portugal and 17.5 per cent. in the UK, but at only 8 per cent. in Greece, 3 per cent. in Luxembourg and 6 per cent. in the Netherlands.

VAT on leisure and tourism admissions is 6 per cent. in Belgium, 5.5 per cent. in France and 3 per cent. in Luxembourg, but 17.5 per cent. in the UK, 17.5 per cent. in the Netherlands and 25 per cent. in Denmark.

[Mr. Elletson]

That is an extraordinary range of VAT rates and it clearly helps to ensure that our tourist attractions, are not competitive. When one considers the effect of that on major attractions such as Blackpool pleasure beach, which every year attract 6 million visitors, and when one considers the effect on their ability to compete with the likes of Euro Disney, one realises that they are placed at a significant competitive disadvantage.

Mr. Sykes: The quality of my hon. Friend's speech has quadrupled the Opposition's representation to help the beleaguered hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam).

Mr. Fabricant: Quintupled.

Mr. Sykes: Quintupled, then. Will my hon. Friend comment for a moment on duty on beer, which is a serious threat to our brewing industry and, therefore, indirectly to the leisure industry? The difference between duty in France and in the United Kingdom is a sore point at the moment. It could lead to a reduction in the number of pubs and a reduction in brewing prosperity. Will my hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Elletson: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is clearly a serious problem, not so much for us in the north of England, as for the south of England, where it is having an appalling effect on coastal resorts and towns. Many of our hon. Friends who represent those areas are very concerned.

Since I began to speak, more Opposition Members have decided to come into the Chamber. Obviously, the message has gone out that the empty Opposition Benches were a disgrace.

People in coastal resorts and people in our historic towns, who are concerned about tourism and about the leisure industry, will continue to regard those empty Benches as disgraceful. They will see how little the Labour party cares about this major industry. I hope that such people will remember that and that they will remember that, although a few Labour Members have now crawled in, the Liberal Democrats continue to be absent. What lesson can we draw from that?

I urge the Minister, who, unlike Opposition Members, is a genuine friend of tourism and the leisure industry, to continue his good work in fighting the battle for tourism and the battle for the leisure industry. I urge my hon. Friend to continue to ensure that this vital British industry continues to grow, as it can.

11.29 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): In response to the final comment by the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), I am very pleased to be joined by my hon. Friends the Members for Newport (Mr. Flynn), for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Yes, the turnout has been bad this morning, but I think that the issue is poorly supported on both sides of the House. Even though there may be a poor turnout from Opposition Members, the complacency of some of the speeches from Government Members matches that lack of interest. It is a problem which we must deal with, and we readily acknowledge that it is an important industry.

I shall briefly respond to a point on hostels made by the hon. Member for Blackpool, North at the end of his speech. The problems that he outlined are in his view created as result of having particular hostels occupied by people on benefit. I understand that difficulties are created when people are living on benefit in hostels on very little money. They do not have jobs and can be seen sitting about the front at seaside resorts. They are not perceived as positive for many resorts and they are not a sight—if one can talk about human beings in that way—that many of hoteliers in his constituency like to see.

The hon. Gentleman talked about dealing with the difficulties of people who are living on benefit, about changing class orders and about long-term structural changes. The hon. Gentleman and his local authority know the real answer very well. If we could build more houses and get people back to work, we would not have to hear the way in which he talked about human beings.

Mr. Elletson *rose—*

Ms Mowlam: I shall not take interventions, on the simple ground that we may go off the point, and that would be unfair for the debate.

May I just apologise on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) who, as hon. Members from both sides of the House know, speaks for the Opposition on tourism? My hon. Friend has done a lot of excellent work on tourism and is a valuable member of the team. Unfortunately, he drew the short straw and had to go to the world cup finals this week, so he is not able to be with us. He is obviously sad to have missed the debate.

I shall pick up on the speech by the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). I welcome the fact that he managed to get this debate today. The hon. Gentleman's commitment to the leisure industry and to tourism over the years has been solid. He has participated in every debate that I have read that the House had throughout the 1980s.

The sad thing is that the hon. Gentleman has to keep saying the same thing. The House heard him today talk about vital catalysts that can be provided by the Department of National Heritage. That was similar to what he said two years ago, when he said:

"my hon. Friend the Minister speaks up for the industry, but words are not always enough;"—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 562.]

Mr. Elletson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Lady simply to brush the important issue of DSS hostels—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady was quite in order, or I would have pulled her up.

Ms Mowlam: I shall answer the hon. Member for Blackpool, North—as is my right—and I shall then talk about the priorities which I want for the leisure industry.

The hon. Member for Swindon has given admirable support to the industry and has tried by various means in the past couple of years to get a greater response from the Government on tourism and the leisure industry. I would say that he had a chance of being the Minister for Tourism after the upcoming reshuffle, but I presume that if I say that from the Opposition Dispatch Box, it will harm his chances.

Speakers today have shown how many issues could be covered in a debate on leisure and tourism. I thought that the quickest way of covering some of them would be to respond to two or three points made by the hon. Member

for Swindon. I shall not take up too much time and stop other hon. Members who have sat through the whole debate getting in.

The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to say that the film industry should receive money from the lottery. "Four Weddings and a Funeral" proves that it can be done, but how much longer do we have to wait for an initiative on film? We are waiting for a White Paper on the BBC and for statements on privacy and on cross-media ownership.

The film industry is so crucial: I agree whole-heartedly with the hon. Gentleman. Let us have some action and statements from the Department of National Heritage on the industry. Let us hope that those are not blocked again by the Department of Trade and Industry or by No. 10 and that we do not have to wait many more months before valuable partnership work is done with the British film industry.

On the BBC, I support the licence fee a little more strongly than the hon. Gentleman. He talks about the necessity in future for taxation in addition to the licence fee. The BBC is undertaking joint venturing, which it is doing internationally. If it remains international, and does not infringe on the licence fee as a part of the national public service that the BBC offers, some of the financial questions raised by the hon. Gentleman will not be a problem for the BBC in next 10 to 15 years.

There are two difficult questions that the BBC is facing immediately; the hon. Gentleman highlighted them and then skirted around them. The first is sport.

Sport is an important part of the leisure industry and the difficulty now is that, if sport remains on cable and satellite, large numbers of people will not be able to see it without paying: it is not a part of the public service as terrestrial television is. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) has been doing a lot of work on the subject and he says that there is a way in which sport should remain in the national domain until cable and satellite penetrate the market to such an extent that there is a genuine choice for people.

The other difficult question relates to pornography in relation to cable and satellite television. The hon. Member for Swindon talked about the importance of freedom of choice for individuals, and he is absolutely right. But with cable and satellite, and some other changes that will come with interactives through fibre-optics and the development of e-mail that we see with Internet, there are problems there for a Government of any hue. Those will be difficult and we ought look at them a little harder.

The hon. Member for Swindon referred to excellence and gave the teaching of music as a good example. We could not agree more. The difficulty is that constraints have been placed on local authorities in terms of the few discretionary awards which are available. Those grants are now so rare that many of the music places at our colleges are taken by students from overseas, because our students cannot afford to go. We should love to see more excellence in music and in art. The problem is that the chance for students is not there, because discretionary awards, regardless of any political points, are a thing of the past.

I emphasise again our support for some of the points made by other hon. Members during the debate. The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) talked about divisions between the English, Welsh and other tourist boards, and emphasised the importance of section 4 and pump-priming. The Opposition support all that and we hope that the Minister will listen to his colleagues, if he does not listen to us.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) asked us to talk to our Labour colleagues—all 62 of them, who make up a major group in the European Parliament—about objective 5. I am sure that we will do what we can in partnership with them to get a shift to a greater emphasis on tourism at a European level. If there is anything else that we can do to help the hon. Gentleman with bits of assistance from our MEPs, all he has to do is ask. They are a strong group and we will work with them.

Mr. Matthew Banks: The hon. Lady has taken seriously the point that I made. So far as my own Euro-constituency of Merseyside West is concerned, perhaps she could encourage her colleague Mr. Stewart to come and visit my constituency a little more regularly. The years go by, and we do not see him.

Ms Mowlam: We all know the problems faced by MEPs, many of whom have eight parliamentary constituencies in their area. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, one can visit one's constituency every weekend and someone is sure to come up and say, "I haven't seen you for years, and I cannot contact you." We all know of those problems, however hard we work. Many of us work very hard.

I will not dwell on some of the other points made by hon. Members, but I shall ask the Minister—if he is awake —*[Interruption.]* His eyes were closed and I was worried that he was no longer with us. There were points raised by other hon. Members which the Opposition would also have emphasised.

I do not think that I need to emphasise the importance of the leisure industry. Hon. Members talked about "4 per cent. of GDP", "1.5 million workers", "every two jobs in the tourist industry means one extra job created", "the fourth largest growth area in the EEC". We all know the statistics and how important tourism is to the economy. The problem is getting it on to the political agenda and avoiding the drift in policy that, sadly, has been apparent even in the two years since the Department was created. The Department needs to be far more proactive in providing a lead for which the industry is desperate. The Department has, sadly, failed to do that. It should also be possible to foster greater co-operation between Departments.

About nine months ago, when I became shadow Secretary of State for National Heritage, the very next day I appeared on "Any Questions" in Chesterfield. I was put up in the Abbeydale hotel owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bramhill. They were delighted that the shadow Secretary of State was staying with them. In common with all hon. Members, when I left I said that, if there was ever anything I could do to help, they should contact me. Sadly, they contacted me two months later because of difficulties they were experiencing. The problem was caused by a minor issue, but it highlights the lack of Government activity.

The English tourist board used to publish a guide called, "Let's Go", which advertised small hotels such as the Abbeydale. Mr. Bramhill wrote to me to say:

"We were dismayed to learn that the ETB is not publishing 'Let's Go' this year. Business arising from 'Let's Go' is a significant factor for us."

He said that it was one of the major factors that attracted business to the hotel, and noted:

[Ms Mowlam]

"Small businesses like ours rely heavily on ETB publications".

The ETB responded that it had ceased to publish the guide partly because of Government cuts in finance and because it intended to publish regional leaflets instead. When looking for somewhere to stay, no one wants to look at seven regional leaflets: one wants to look through a proper publication. It is fair to say, therefore, that I was made aware of the difficulties that the tourist industry faces soon after I became shadow Secretary of State.

In the past nine months, I have travelled extensively, and have visited every seaside resort that has been mentioned today. I have gone from Aberdeen and the Lemon Tree right down through Yorkshire to Scarborough, where I will be tomorrow.

Mr. Sykes: The hon. Lady has not written to me about that.

Ms Mowlam: I am telling the hon. Member now. I have also visited resorts in the south.

The sad thing is that, whether one speaks to people who work in the hotel industry, leisure parks or whatever, the message is the same. All they want is decent leadership and a clear strategy. I agree with the hon. Member for Swindon that it is partly a matter of investment. I also agree with the hon. Member for Blackpool, North, who hinted that is also partly a matter of funding. The difficulty with such funding is that one has to dip into so many different pots to put the money together.

As the hon. Member for Southport said, money is available through the European regional development fund to aid regeneration, but the capping of local authorities means that they have less to spend on such projects. If those local authorities received a decent sum of money to enable them to repair local infrastructure, the problem facing certain resorts could be overcome. All that is needed is a bit of direction and strategic thinking. The difficulty is that, in the past two years, we have not been given such a lead.

I do not want to dwell on my constituency, but it is a classic example of what happens when the necessary funds are unavailable. Redcar, which is further up the coast from Scarborough, used to be a seaside resort. People would go there from Scarborough during Whit week, and then go on to Seahouses and elsewhere.

If we are honest with one another, we will admit that the difficulty is that decay and lack of regeneration and growth have happened quicker in some seaside resorts than in others. The hon. Member for Scarborough is bullish and vibrant about its future, and my local authority and local industries want to behave in the same manner. They are fighting very hard, just like you, to win grants for joint ventures and to target areas for development.

The honest answer is that the number of visitors has declined. The state of the infrastructure in various resorts is a serious problem whether it is your pier at Southport, the front at Scarborough or the decline in Redcar—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Mowlam: I apologise: I meant the pier in the constituency of the hon. Member for Southport.

The problems caused by lack of investment and difficulties in raising new investment to combat infrastructure problems are common to all of us, but some resorts are feeling it harder than others. We are all struggling because we all have to dip into different pots of money to get better assistance, whether from the European Community or through local initiatives and urban programmes. If we had some Government lead, those problems would not be so severe.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I accept some of the points that the hon. Lady has made, but I hope that you will accept, as I said earlier, that my constituency is a classic example of the kind of partnership that we should all promote. The Government, through the urban partnership fund, pump-primed with £310,000 the multi-million sea front redevelopment strategy in my constituency. That is the way forward and that is what the Government are now doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been accused of all sorts of things this morning; it has been "you", "you", "you". Hon. Members should bear that in mind.

Ms Mowlam: Yes, I will.

I am pleased by that intervention from the hon. Member for Southport, because it reinforces the argument that the Labour party has made for the past 15 years—one cannot depend on the market alone to deliver. The market is important, but, as we both know, it cannot deliver the developments that we need to regenerate seaside resorts.

I accept that joint partnerships can be entered into to cover the large expenditure that is needed from the private sector, but we need the public-private mix for pump priming, future development and proactive strategic thinking. It is sad that it has taken the Government so long to understand that. We have argued for such a mix for the past 15 years, we remain consistent, but the Government have body-swerved and shifted.

I have highlighted the common problems that are caused by the lack of leadership from the Department. That is not only appreciated by the Opposition and recognised by some hon. Members who have spoken today, but supported in a recent document from the Confederation of British Industry, entitled " A Wealth of Attraction", which was published a couple of months ago. It notes that the Government have not given tourism a sufficiently central position in their thinking:

"The Government must demonstrate its commitment to the industry as a source of growth and jobs. It is not sufficient for the Government to delegate responsibility for the industry to the tourist boards, valuable though the work of these boards is."

That very point was made by one Conservative Member today.

I will not bother the House with the views of the British Tourist Authority and the ETB, but they, too, want specific steps to be taken by the Government, because they would make a difference to the well-being of the tourist industry.

There are four things that the Government could do which would make a difference to the future of the leisure and tourist industry. First, the Government should provide basic information. That is a basic task, and it is depressing that the Government have not already performed it. As I listened to the facts cited this morning, I was interested to note that we all churn out the same ones. We have got them from the same reports, which are a couple of years old. The CBI used those same reports.

When one asks what is the multiplier in terms of jobs in tourism or in terms of rebuilding infrastructure, the facts are not in the public domain. The odd City report is published, the London Arts Board report is about to be

published and other odd reports are published about various towns, but we do not have the kind of detailed statistics that should be available. They would make a difference, because they would enable us to argue for the industry and achieve a better understanding of it. We would then be able to demonstrate how crucial it is to the economy.

I believe that the figures we have quoted are lower than the real ones. We could put a much stronger case about the importance of tourism if the Government provided the proper factual base.

Secondly, the Government must become more proactive about tourism. I am quite ready to acknowledge that the current Minister was better than the previous one, and that the next one may be better than this one.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat) *indicated dissent.*

Ms Mowlam: Perhaps that is not possible. Low calibre and lack of quality are probably common to all of them.

The difficulty is that no Minister is prepared to put tourism at the centre of his or her agenda and to be as proactive as necessary.

D-day was a classic example. One has only to look at how other countries used D-day as a tourist opportunity. The French airlines and public and private sectors worked out packages for anyone with a D-day veteran in the family going from the United States to France in August.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Lady accept that the French airline to which she refers, Air France, which is owned by the French Government, made a thumping great loss last year compared to British Airways, which is not owned by the British Government?

Ms Mowlam: We can discuss the advantages of one company over another at another time. We could then quote British companies that have done better than French companies. The point that I am making is the importance of tourism and its knock-on effect on other industries. D-day was a good example of how the French used an occasion to make a difference to people visiting the country.

When I ask the Government to be more proactive, I mean that their role is to act in partnership with the private sector to deal with the problems of regional imbalance, for example. We are sometimes told that Cambridge is full of tourists and can take no more, whereas other parts of the country are desperately looking for more tourists.

Mr. Fabricant: Durham.

Ms Mowlam: Durham is a good example. If the Government had some kind of proactive strategy, it would make a difference not only to tourism but to the quality of life of people who live in tourist areas.

If the Government were more proactive, they could also look at some of the changes taking place in tourism. Tourists who visit England now do not have the kind of holidays that they had before. The hon. Member for Swindon was absolutely right to talk about a "quality service". That is why it was wrong to abolish the wages councils and why we need a minimum wage, but I shall not go into that matter now.

Quality holidays must be offered. Yesterday, I spoke to two Americans who came here to cycle between castles. Different types of holiday are developing, and the Department must have a strategy by which it can work with the private sector to see where the industry can go. I am simply asking it to do some thinking to assist the BTB and ETB in seeing what the future holds.

If the Government had such a proactive policy, it would make a difference in terms of a coherent strategy for the important relationship between tourism and the environment. Conservative Members who have spoken so far did not mention the Council for the Protection of Rural England study published earlier this year. In "Leisure Landscapes", Jonathan Dimbleby said:

> "There are growing conflicts between the needs of tourism and leisure in the English countryside and the protection of our precious environment. The inadequacies of public policy and failures in practice mean these conflicts are going virtually unrecognised. We must wake up and put things right."

One is not saying that the environment or tourism should predominate, but if we had a proactive Government who were thinking about the issues, we could have a strategy between the demands of the environment and those of the tourist industry.

The Department of National Heritage is trying to co-ordinate between regional sports councils and regional tourist boards. That is fine, but unless we have better co-operation between Departments on issues that affect the leisure industry and tourism, we shall not achieve the changes that will make a difference. The privatisation of British Rail is a classic example. The loss of the rover pass and the travelcard will make a big difference to tourists. If Departments had better relationships, our tourist and leisure industry would be much better. The whole question of deregulation comes into that.

Some simple measures could be taken speedily to make a difference to the leisure industry. Hotel insurance was mentioned by the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes). Holiday insurance is a continuing problem. As every hon. Member who deals with his or her constituency mail knows, there is a lack of adequate insurance for holidaymakers, who often take out the wrong kind.

If the Jopling report is discussed by the end of July, it may mean that we shall work more sensible hours, which will be a plus for everybody. Given the low standing in which most members of the public hold us, it will not help if we work even fewer hours than they think we already work. I have compared the public holidays of other EU countries and, yet again, we are bottom of the list. Germany has 15 days; Luxembourg has 14 days; Portugal has 13 days; and, as with so many other European tables, we are bottom of the list with nine. I throw that fact into the debate as a suggestion. It is being debated elsewhere, but it could be considered.

Although the national lottery could make a great difference to leisure and tourism in the coming year, it will be merely a secondary source of funding. The hon. Member for Southport said that the Minister should draw up proposals, but he is meant to be independent, so he cannot do so.

The problem is that big organisations such as Covent Garden, Albertropolis and the Tate have whole departments working on the national lottery, whereas smaller projects around the country have no such backup. I support the lottery, which, potentially could make a great difference to arts and leisure, but, if we are not careful, it will become metropolis-based. There will be problems with the partnership between public funding and private funding, which is less available outside London.

[Ms Mowlam]

I hope to goodness that the Government are not daft enough to indulge in the political short-termism in which they have indulged elsewhere. I am not scoring cheap points: I genuinely believe that. They have appointed political placepeople to the five bodies that give out the money, which is incredible short sightedness for the country's future. We could have worked on that for the good of the country as we approach the next century. If the Government indulge in political short-termism, people will say, "What a surprise—another millennium project in a Tory marginal constituency in the run-up to the next election." That will be appalling.

Let us hope that that does not happen, because it will destroy another potential opportunity held by the tourist and leisure industries. They have a great future. It is sad that the Government do not believe it.

11.57 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am glad to have an opportunity to catch your eye this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a wide-ranging debate which, given the furtive imagination of some hon. Members in their books recently, could take us down some interesting alleys. I wish to concentrate on the tourism industry, about which much has already been said this morning.

The tourist industry forms the fourth biggest employer in my constituency; the Cotswolds. I commend any hon. Members listening to or reading my speech to visit the Cotswolds. The choice of hotels is excellent, from the luxury end of the market to the good-value end. We have the highest number of listed buildings of any local authority in the country. The Cotswold stone market towns and villages are an excellent architectural feature and well worth visiting. The countryside in the Cotswolds forms one of the most important areas of outstanding natural beauty in the country. Following the commercial break, I move on.

Tourism is an important industry in the Cotswolds. It has managed to employ an additional 5,000 people in the past decade. That is important to employment in Gloucestershire because that industry now employs about 17,000 jobs directly and about 25,000 jobs on the basis of the Heart of England tourist board's estimate of one tourism job creating another half a job elsewhere in the economy. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) said that there were no published statistics. That report is one source of published statistics.It is interesting that in the past decade in manufacturing, which still forms the largest single sector of industry in my constituency, the number of jobs has declined by 6 per cent. while in tourism the number has increased by 2 per cent., providing a further 5,000 jobs.

The Department of National Heritage has been formed for only two years and combines many different functions, which were portrayed in our last election manifesto. Incidentally, that manifesto had a far more ambitious target for the cultural and built heritage of this country than either of the two Opposition parties pledged in theirs. The Department encompasses broadcasting, arts, sports, the film industry, national heritage, national lottery and tourism.

All those functions of the Department of National Heritage are basically tax consuming, with the exception of the lottery and tourism, which contributes so much to decrease our balance of payments deficit. It would, therefore, be encouraging if, instead of specifying tourism last in its list of priorities, the Department would alter the list in its next annual report and place tourism first. As chapter 9 of the Department's report says, that huge industry earned almost £9 billion this year in foreign earnings. Spending on tourism in this country amounts to about £20 billion, or 4 per cent. of our gross domestic product, and employs more than 1.5 million people. The important aspect of that employment is that those people are employed in thousands of diverse small and medium-sized businesses. I hope that when the next annual report is produced, tourism will be moved up the list of priorities.

I commend to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State the format of the Department of the Environment's report, whereby achievements are laid out in one column and targets to be met are laid out in a different column. That is a good format and I commend it, not only to the Department of National Heritage, but to all Government Departments as a useful format for their annual reports.

Given the size of the industry, more attention could be paid to tourism. Although we are doing well in this country, we could do much better in the tourist industry. The British Tourist Authority and the National Trust provided me with useful information. As has already been mentioned, Britain is the sixth most popular destination after the United States of America, France, Spain, Italy and Austria. Where do the visitors come from? Almost two thirds come from western Europe and 18 per cent. come from North America. What do they do? A high percentage of those visitors are return visitors, which is extremely encouraging for the future health of our tourist industry, and 48 per cent. of visitors say that they use a hotel as their main or major residence while staying here.

Why do those visitors come here? By far the largest advantage that we have in this country is that English is the most universally used language in the world. Not only is it the number one language in the old Commonwealth countries, but it is the second language in many other countries. The British Tourist Authority's overseas visitors survey discovered that most people were happy with the linguistic reception that they received in this country. The most notable exception was, of course, the French, who complained that they were not met often enough with their mother tongue.

What do visitors do when they come to this country? The survey confirmed that they come here mainly for our culture. They come here particularly for our stately homes and art galleries, and especially our museums, with up to 62 per cent. relating the latter as being quite or very important to them.

What are the future trends? How can we improve the deficit in the balance of trade and tourism? Obviously, some tourist organisations, such as the National Trust, do an excellent job in encouraging visitors to come to this country. Between 1975 and 1988, the number of visitors to its properties increased by 60 per cent. and it now has more than 10 million visitors to its properties.That is a remarkable achievement and brings considerable problems. The sheer numbers of feet trampling through some of the National Trust properties and some of our national

parks means that the trust has a considerable task in preventing deterioration of those properties and carrying out refurbishment works to public rights of way in the national parks. However, that is surely a small price to pay when one considers the number of visitors, domestic and foreign, that the National Trust encourages to visit those excellent properties and parks, and the amount of tourism that it brings to this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) made an excellent, wide-ranging speech. I congratulate him on bringing about today's debate and I am glad to be able to support my near neighbour in making a contribution today. As I said in an intervention on his speech, when one considers the amounts spent by the regional tourist boards —the English tourist board, the Welsh tourist board, the Scottish tourist board and the Irish tourist board—one finds that in the past year the English tourist board has had a cut of about £2.5 million, while the Scottish tourist board has had an increase of about £3.5 billion, and both the Irish and Welsh tourist boards spend more than the English tourist board. However, the number of visitors are about 83 per cent. for England, about 10 per cent. for Scotland, 3.5 per cent. for Wales and a mere 0.5 per cent. for Northern Ireland. It therefore seems to me that we have got the balance of our spending on tourism wrong.

As I mentioned earlier, if one goes to Boston in the USA, for example, one finds that, from two separate offices, the Welsh tourist board is promoting Wales and the British tourist board is promoting other parts of the kingdom. It is surely much more important to encourage visitors to come to anywhere in the United Kingdom rather than go to France, Italy, Austria or any of the other destinations. I therefore ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State seriously to consider co-ordinating with his hon. Friends and with the Welsh, Scottish and Irish tourist boards to discover whether the resources that we spend on tourism could be spent more effectively on promoting Britain.

After all, the British Tourist Authority, in the survey to which I referred earlier, has found that a quarter of all intending visitors to this country contact one or other of the tourist boards before they come here. More important, when they contact that tourist board they have probably already made up their minds where they want to visit in this country. If we could encourage more general knowledge about the diversity of culture and built heritage in this country, before visitors make up their minds to go to other destinations they might consider choosing Britain as their destination for this year's foreign holiday. I believe that we could do even better and create yet more jobs in our tourist industry if we co-ordinated the money that we spend, which becomes increasingly precious as Government expenditure becomes tighter.

Provided that we continue to improve our facilities, the future for inward tourism is excellent. As has already been said this morning, the channel tunnel, with a potential market of 350 million citizens of the European Union by the end of this year after the accession of Austria, Sweden, Norway and Finland, gives us additional and increased opportunities in tourism. It is interesting to note that the European Travel Commission report forecast that demographic changes across Europe will mean that by the year 2000 one in three Europeans will be aged more than 55. The visitors to this country will thus be an increasingly aging bunch, which will also provide the tourist industry with a considerable challenge. We must cater for that trend. Members of that group are likely to have more spending power. As the prosperity of western Europe has increased, they will have built up greater occupational pensions. They will require more personal attention from the tourist industries, more hospitality in their reception and higher standards of comfort in hotels. They will require hotels that provide increasingly higher standards, are cleaner and offer a wider diversity of health facilities and facilities such as swimming pools. That demographic trend presents a huge challenge to our industry.

The aim must be to promote greater tourism in this country. We must compare our tourist facilities with those of other places. I have come back from a visit with the Select Committee on the Environment to look at shopping centres in France and Germany. It was interesting to look at the tourist facilities in Paris, in the charming town of Freiburg in west Germany and in the industrial city of Leipzig. I found that the standard of hotels in Paris was not particularly good—or at any rate, the standard was not that high in the hotel in which the taxpayer was prepared to put up the members of the Select Committee—but when I visited the tourist attractions in France, such as the Louvre with its new glass pyramid, I found that facilities were excellent. The directional signs were superb, and the quality of shops and information below the galleries was first class. Institutions in this country have something to learn from that.

Some of our major institutions, such as the Tate, have had major facelifts. Without wishing to cast aspersions, however, I must say that many of our other national institutions present, on the face of it, an unattractive image to tourists. They have wonderful cultural aspects, antiquities and pictures inside, but on the face of it they appear unappealing. My hon. Friend the Minister could encourage our institutions to see whether they can become more appealing to visitors. Some of the facilities seem to be there merely for the benefit of the curators rather than the visitors.

It is excellent that the Victoria and Albert museum now opens for longer hours on Sundays. I wish that other attractions would take into account the wishes of tourists and stay open for longer hours. In my market town of Tewkesbury, we have one of the finest stone work carvings of any abbey in Europe. Visitors flock to see the abbey which is open all hours, but at 5 pm the tearooms and shops close and one sees tourists milling around with nothing to do until they are able to return to their bed and breakfast or other accommodation. Surely the top shops, many of which complain that they are finding it hard to make a living, could be a little more innovative and inventive and stay open a little longer. When I mentioned that possibility, however, the employers shrug their shoulders and say that it would be hard on those who have to work in the shops. If more of the unemployed people in Gloucestershire were employed on a part-time basis, that would allow shops to stay open longer and make the businesses more viable.

I conclude by quoting from the report of the Department of National Heritage. I can sum up the debate no better than by quoting from paragraph 1.4 of that excellent report, which states:

"Each of the sectors for which the Department has responsibility in Government makes an important contribution to the quality of life. They provide enjoyment, relaxation and stimulation. They help to create a well-educated and well-informed society with a rich and varied cultural life, a society which places value on the mental and physical well-being of the individual. They contribute to a sense of national identity

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

and national pride."

If we strive to create excellence in this country in everything that we do in our cultural and tourist life, surely the lives of our citizens will be enriched, both culturally and commercially via the tourist industry. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take every possible action that he and the Government can take to promote this country abroad and help our citizens with a varied cultural life in this country.

12.14 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I wish to make a brief contribution to the debate as I have the second motion on the Order Paper and I understand that I might be lucky enough to reach it today. I do not want to test the patience of Conservative Members who are still waiting to speak.

I offer some friendly advice to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson). One should never criticise the absence of hon. Members from this place if one is going to do a bunk soon afterwards—the hon. Gentleman has gone already. It is a silly hon. Member who criticises others for not being present as it means that those here have a much better chance of speaking. The hon. Gentleman made a fairly foolish contribution.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on choosing this subject for debate and on being lucky enough to have won the ballot. It is strange that so much business in this place is still based on the fortunes of the wheel or raffle ticket—the ballot box. I am sure that we could find more sensible ways of selecting our business. I am not complaining because I am speaking in this debate.

Most of today's debate has been about tourism. I understand the points that Conservative Members have made about their constituencies. Newham, North-West might not sound the ideal tourist location, but it has many tourist attractions to offer, not least the northern sewer outfall walk. That may not sound pretty, but I can assure Conservative Members that it is delightful. In a couple of weeks, in conjunction with Thames Water, we shall be opening a green trail across the borough which will provide an attractive addition to its recreational facilities.

I acknowledge the support that the Government have given in terms of funds for city challenge and the restoration of old and historic buildings in Newham. I also acknowledge the ministerial visits that have been made, when Ministers have clearly been impressed by the opportunities that east London has to offer for the promotion of tourism in London as a whole. When one talks about tourism in London, one often speaks as though it were concentrated around the tower, Tower Hamlets and Westminster. But there are many other parts of our great capital city where there are sights for tourists to visit and we want to encourage them to do just that.

I wish to raise two specific points as I have the opportunity of getting a reply from the Minister. We have talked about tourism and leisure—one of the important ingredients of which is hotels. I want to talk about the incipient hotel that is being constructed on the other side of the river at County hall. There are heritage responsibilities in respect of County hall and I want to ask the Minister some questions. I will not re-run the abolition battle, but it seems scandalous to me and to many Londoners that County hall should have been designated a hotel to be run by a Japanese leisure group called the Shirayama group. The London School of Economics put in a bid and it would have been appropriate if that wonderful public building had been used by a great institution of learning, rather than being turned into the circus that is now being played out on the other side of the river.

I do not know whether the Minister has seen the large banner that has gone up on the roof of County hall. On the river elevation it says, "Ten years" and, I understand, on the other side says, "on top"; it relates to Virgin Atlantic. One of the reasons why the GLC got up Mrs. Thatcher's nose so much was the banner that we put on the roof of County hall showing the unemployment figures for London. Incidentally, the number of unemployed people in London has continued to rise ever since the GLC was abolished—the banner would show 500,000 by now. It certainly upset the Government of the day, though, and many attempts were made to do something about it. I notice, however, that no Minister seems upset by the defacing of County hall by an enormous advertisement for Virgin Atlantic.

Some hon. Members have signed early-day motion 1382, which urges the planning authority to investigate whether planning permission has been granted for the site. I must tell them that planning permission was not granted. Instead of tabling an early-day motion, I approached the planning department of Lambeth borough council. It appears that Virgin Atlantic and the Shirayama group are in contravention of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992.

On the riverside elevation of County hall there is a banner advertising a "family fun place" and the name of a demolition contractor. That was not what planning permission was given for when Shirayama put in its original application. The advertisements contravene planning law. What does the Minister propose to do about enforcing planning regulations? These advertisements affect Londoners—they offend our vision. They may not offend the Minister, but they certainly upset many Londoners and Opposition Members of Parliament.

This cowboy organisation, Shirayama, and its chairman, Mr. Toyota are making fools of us and of Londoners in general. It is sad that County hall is being taken away from Londoners and will no longer be the home of the sort of London-wide local government which the Opposition intend to set up again once we are back in office. It also worries me that the building might end up like Battersea power station. That, too, has become a disgrace. Tourists look at it and wonder what we have done to that wonderful building. There is some controversy about whether to restore it and what to use it for. The GLC wanted to turn it into an indoor athletics stadium, which London needs, but unfortunately we were abolished and were thus unable to complete the project. So along came another cowboy with big ideas and small pockets, wanting to open another Disneyworld. Now the roof is off the building and the structure is becoming dangerous.

English Heritage is one of the Minister's areas of responsibility: it reports to him. I hope, therefore, that he will take a close interest in what is happening at Battersea power station. Sooner or later, someone will approach him or his colleague, the Secretary of State for the Environment, to say that it is now a dangerous structure which must be removed. Then someone will come along

and cream off the remains for another property development. I believe that the power station is now in the hands of a Hong Kong or Chinese group. That group will be able to claim that the structure is dangerous and then build whatever offices it wants on the site—and yet another important building will have been lost to Londoners.

As the Minister knows, County hall has a grade II listed facade. The principal floor is also grade II listed and has a war memorial and many other valuable architectural features that relate to London's history and local government. I find it disgraceful that a Japanese cowboy company should be trying to circumvent planning permission, altering its original proposals for County hall by stealth.

I have with me a letter from Lambeth borough council to the lawyers of the Shirayama group. It arose out of a question that was tabled in the House; the Department of the Environment has asked Lambeth borough council what is happening at County hall so as to be able to reply to that question. The letter says:

"The question has been prompted by a large banner fixed to the riverside elevation and reading 'family fun place'. There is also a further banner advertising a demolition contractor and three flags (the Union Jack, Japanese and Virgin Group) on the flag pole. At the recent South Bank Exhibition in the Royal Festival Hall, Shirayama displayed drawings showing two floors of commercial office floor space and a large virtual reality centre on the ground floor. Neither use falls within the terms of the Council's conditional permission for development of 25 March 1993. You will recall the various press items last November reporting Mr. Toyota as saying his proposals included a Disneyworld and a family funfair."

The letter continues by warning the solicitor:

"I appreciate that you may not be fully aware of your client's intentions, but given the above I would reiterate my request to you to remind Shirayama of the terms of the existing planning permission."

I want the Government to take action; if they do not, County hall may become the same sort of decrepit and derelict shell as Battersea power station has become—and the responsibility will rest entirely with Ministers'. It is incumbent on the Government to act now.

There is an old saying in politics: "Don't get mad, get even". I am doing both; I am angry, but I am also determined to get even. If anything keeps me in politics it is my desire to live to see a Labour Government. I only hope I will not die before there is one—I assume that I will not die in the next two years. When the Labour Government come to power, I want them to stamp all over the people who have stamped on Londoners, including the Tory politicians, the quangos and the Shirayamas of this world. I am angry now, but I hope soon to be even.

The Minister is also responsible for football. The hon. Member for Swindon rightly said that it would be great to have a British team in the World cup. At least we can all cheer on the Irish—I hope that all hon. Members will be doing that tonight, when the Irish play Mexico, although damn me if I have not noticed that it coincides with my advice surgery. Perhaps my advice will have to be a little more abrupt than usual this evening. I hope that my constituents will sympathise, and I shall tell them why.

It would indeed be nice to have a United Kingdom team; perhaps the Minister could promote that idea. We have so much talent in the United Kingdom that it seems a pity not to combine it in one football team. I know that that is a rather controversial point of view, but, given our failure to send a team to the World cup, perhaps we should think about it carefully.

Today I want to discuss cup final ticket allocations. I am still in mourning for the fact that my team, Chelsea, lost the cup final. If it had not been for some strutting little pedantic public schoolmaster purporting to be a referee and awarding that second penalty, the result would have been quite different. I want to take this opportunity to apologise publicly to all the people around me who were scandalised by my obscene language, in which I described the sort of things I would do to that referee if I ever bumped into him. I have cooled down since then and I apologise to all concerned for my rather picturesque language. I do feel a little ashamed of it now, but I was emotionally involved in the fact that my team had reached a cup final. It is no small thing to have victory snatched away by crass refereeing —that only added insult to injury.

To get to the cup final is one thing; to get access to the final is another matter altogether. I was—again—scandalised by the way the Football Association allocated its tickets. I do not know all the details, but Chelsea ended up with 18,000 and Manchester United with 26,000, and about 30,000 tickets went to other people. To try to find out who the other people were, I co-operated with the BBC on a programme that is due to come out some time later next month and we bought some tickets. We bought one through an advertisement in the *Evening Standard* for which we paid £375. Stamped on the back of that ticket was the name of the county association, Sussex county football association. We paid another £250 to a tout outside Wembley who claimed that the ticket came from a Manchester United player.

Those tickets have been sent to Mr. Kelly at the Football Association and I await his response because, clearly, there is a flourishing black market. It is outrageous that supporters who follow their teams cannot get in because others have been given tickets that they do not want and sell them on; something should be done about it. Given the national significance of the cup final I hope that the Government will take some interest in that. I am waiting to hear exactly what will happen in relation to the questions that I have put to the Minister.

It is annoying to the many genuine supporters who are effectively barred from getting to the game because of the unavailability of tickets to the competing clubs that, along with the great majority of people in the place, who I am sure do some work, are hangers-on, freeloaders, royalty of no fixed abode and MPs who write in. I hope that the Minister will speak about that because it is becoming a scandal.

Football has many problems over issues such as under-cover payments and financial irregularities. I asked the Minister whether he would instigate an inquiry into the rules governing the financial arrangements of FA premier league clubs, but he just said no, he did not even offer. I can tell the Minister that many people outside are far more interested in what goes on in their football clubs than in what happens in this place. That might be their mistake, but it is a fact and we should address some of the felt needs of those people, especially in the context of the organisation of their football clubs because that is important to them.

I also asked the Minister whether he would make it his policy to set up an independent regulator of FA Premier League and Football League clubs in England, but, again, he refused and said that it was a matter for the football authorities. These matters are perhaps too important to be left to the ossified Football Association which still lives in

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the 19th century in the way that it runs this great national game of ours. I hope that the Minister will show some interest in that.

It was grossly unfair for the Football Association to move in on Tottenham Hotspur and ban it from the FA cup and deduct 12 points. That deduction probably means that Tottenham Hotspur will be relegated next year. I am all for getting wrongdoers and I am glad that the Inland Revenue is investigating Tottenham Hotspur and a number of other clubs, but it is wrong to penalise the fans. They were not responsible for those irregularities and it is most unfair on them that their club will probably be relegated next season and they will not have the opportunity to see it in the FA cup. The Minister should recognise that the Government should at least have an opinion on that unfairness, that infringement of natural justice. I hope that in his reply the Minister will give the House the benefit of such an opinion.

12.31 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on his excellent and wide-ranging speech. I agreed with practically all that he said, but I disagree with him on cable television, and I shall deal with that later.

The House will know that my constituency has become a tourist centre for journalists, who visit it to describe events after they have happened. It has also become a tourist centre for socialist Members. I caution both sets of people not to be unwise by writing off my victory or that of Basildon just yet.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon and I entered the House on the same day. We agree on many issues, but one matter certainly divides us—football. My hon. Friend supports Swindon, and I support the team in the constituency of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), which is West Ham. I much regret, but I do not fully regret, that we beat Swindon in both matches this year. I am sorry that my hon. Friend's team was relegated from the Premier league, and I hope that the House will join me in hoping that the team gains promotion to the Premier league next year.

I could not possibly not comment on the speech by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. It would be stretching the imagination to say that he and I could agree on anything, other than perhaps animal welfare. I did not agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the GLC. I do not agree with what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said about football. But one thing on which I undoubtedly agree with him is his anger. He is angry about the Conservative party. I and many of my hon. Friends are very angry with the behaviour of socialism at the moment.

Of course, the hon. Gentleman is not in any sense guilty, because, if he had his way—he clearly articulates what he believes socialism stands for—I am sure that the Labour party would clearly tell us what its policies were, and would have a leader articulate them.

Under the motion on leisure, if Opposition Members believe that, over the next two years, Conservative Members will sit back and allow the general public somehow to swallow this designer socialism, they are very wrong, and they would be foolish to think that they can get away with the same plea as that used by the President of the United States, that it is time for a change.

Moving on to the motion before the House, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon that leisure—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I understood that the hon. Gentleman was already referring to the motion before the House. The admission from him that he was not, is not something that the Chair welcomes.

Mr. Amess: I stand fully corrected.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Is it not the case that my hon. Friend was directly referring to the motion? He was talking about socialism and socialism is so un-serious these days that it has become a leisure industry.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) is quite right to describe socialism as part of the leisure industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon was right when he said that leisure for some people is watching television. It may be eating or sleeping, or, for us politicians, it may be talking. I praise the leisure industry in the country, especially the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), a fellow Essex Member. As the House knows, Essex is the finest county in the country.

I do not believe that we are doing a good job of promoting ourselves at the moment. I blame the Opposition in particular for, at every opportunity, talking the country down, which is doing great damage, especially to leisure.

When one visits Disneyworld in Orlando or if one goes to the Epcot centre, all countries have a display for visitors and an enjoyable ride is provided on which visitors may go. Little countries, medium-sized countries and large countries all offer a good facility for people. Yet the British effort is ye olde pub and ye olde thatched cottage. We cannot even run to giving people a decent ride.

I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) were in their places earlier. It seems extraordinary that a wonderful ride—although I have no desire to go on it myself—has been opened recently in Blackpool on which one can drop at practically 90 deg. If we can do that in Blackpool, why, for goodness' sake, cannot those people who promote this country abroad concentrate for once on doing that very thing?

Mr. Tony Banks: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's desire for a good ride; many of his colleagues could no doubt give him some acute advice in that respect. But what has that got to do with the Opposition? He started off, before he went on to the ride, by saying that the Opposition were failing to bolster British tourism and that they were talking the country down. I do not see the connection. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will enlighten me.

Mr. Amess: I have much to say about the Opposition talking the country down. I have no doubt that they would not agree with me that an issue such as the way in which our industry is displayed abroad is something on which we should concentrate. I shall explain precisely the sort of points that I am talking about.

Ms Mowlam *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Amess: The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) shakes her head, but it will become clear why I

believe that the Opposition have much to answer for. There are many ways in which, at no cost, we could talk the country up and direct our resources far better.

Ours is the finest country in the world, but the Opposition continually run it down, which affects the leisure industry. The Opposition keep telling people that the trains are better in France. They are not. The Opposition keep telling people that the streets are cleaner in Germany. They are not. The Opposition keep telling people that everyone in Japan works harder, but they do not —that is another lot of nonsense. Opposition Members are guilty of talking the country down, and that is damaging.

One of my hon. Friends said that Britain was the world's sixth greatest tourist attraction. Britain has had a huge influence on many countries, and I want it to be the world's No. 1 tourist attraction.

Ms Mowlam: Britain may be the world's sixth biggest attraction in terms of overseas visitors, whose numbers have increased in the past couple of years—but its percentage share of tourists has declined.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we do not talk down this country. We do not say that the trains are better in France, only that we want a channel tunnel link between the coast and London. We do not say that the streets are dirtier in Britain, only that local authorities should have the same rights as local authorities in Germany to make certain decisions. We do not say that the people of Japan work harder, only that British workers should enjoy the same health, safety and wage protection as Japanese workers.

Mr. Amess: I could not disagree more. I have never known a more irresponsible Opposition. They have no policy initiatives. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West castigated one of my colleagues for commenting on the lack of attendance at this debate. My hon. Friend was less than charitable. We know that Opposition Members are working hard in their constituencies. It is more likely that they are having a policy review to explain yet again where they stand on this issue. Much damage is done by Opposition Members criticising this country and destroying morale.

Whenever I get into a taxi, I ask the driver, "How's business?" We always discuss tourism and leisure. It is interesting that claims that have no basis in fact are perpetuated and repeated, which is quite wrong.

Mr. Tony Banks: What does the average taxi driver say about the Prime Minister? Will the hon. Gentleman be honest?

Mr. Amess: The average taxi driver at least knows that we have a Prime Minister who is a decent, honourable man—

Ms Mowlam: No, he is a liar.

Mr. Amess: — who is prepared to tell this country and the House what are his policies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should be grateful if the hon. Lady would withdraw her sedentary remark.

Ms Mowlam: I apologise for calling the Prime Minister a liar, which is totally unacceptable in parliamentary terms. He may be economical with the truth occasionally, but clearly he is not a liar.

Mr. Banks: But that is what the average taxi driver thinks.

Mr. Amess: No—I can tell the hon. Member for Newham, North-West that the average taxi driver tells me that he never, ever wants a Labour Government—he does not want socialism.

I much wanted Britain to be chosen as the venue for the Olympic games in the year 2000. Opposition Members congratulated Manchester on its bid, and I share in that. It was a marvellous effort, and I congratulate also my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on he way that he argued his case. We clearly saw the depth of patriotism aroused at the last Olympic games in Barcelona. This is not a frivolous point. Every time that a Spanish competitor looked likely to win, the king and queen of Spain could be seen jumping up and down in their seats in encouragement.

Mr. Elletson: Does my hon. Friend agree that many taxi drivers in Manchester immensely appreciated the way in which the Prime Minister had argued his case? Should we not continue to support Manchester, and ensure that it is the "Olympic bid" city next time as well?

Mr. Amess: That is slightly more controversial ground. I was about to make my suggestion for the next Olympic bid—

Mr. Hendry: Not Basildon!

Mr. Amess: It might be at the back of my mind. But it is no good our waiting until 1996 or 2000 to decide on the venue for the games; we must decide now, as a country, that we want to hold them here at the next opportunity.

We must be determined and talk the country up. It would be a wonderful boost if the next Olympic games took place here. I am disappointed that they will not take place here in the year 2000, but at least they will take place in one of our former colonies, and it is a great comfort that Her Majesty the Queen will be there to open the games.

Mr. Fabricant: I agree whole-heartedly that Manchester put in a very good bid, with enthusiasm. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the many reasons why Manchester was not selected—and why it gained so few votes—is that it is not recognised internationally as a capital city? It is not a capital city, but, although Ankara is the capital of Turkey, Istanbul was recognised as the commercial capital.

Sydney is the commercial capital of Australia, and Beijing is both the commercial and the constitutional capital of the People's Republic of China. I hate the idea of basing everything in the south-east, but if we are to bid for the Olympic games in 2004, as I hope that we will—and if we are to have a realistic chance of success—surely we shall have to base them in London.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend tempts me to speak against part of the United Kingdom, which I am not prepared to do. I want to make positive suggestions. I hope that my hon. Friends will not take offence, but I believe that London and Scotland have very strong cases. I hope that Manchester will hold the Commonwealth games—it has a strong case in that regard—but I think that London would be the ideal centre for the Olympics.

Earlier this week, I visited docklands with some of my hon. Friends. Here is another example of Opposition Members' talking the country down. Docklands could not be reproduced anywhere else in the world: it is a wonderful creation. Baroness Thatcher was entirely responsible for driving the docklands initiative.

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All the houses there have now been sold or let, and Canary Wharf is 50 per cent. occupied. The *Daily Mirror*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, Sears and one of the big advertising companies are there. It is looking very good, and we should be proud. I come from the area, and know what a dump docklands used, sadly, to be; I am certainly proud that the new infrastructure is of such high quality.

If we succeeded in our bid to hold the Olympic games in London, docklands would be an ideal centre because of its attractive use of water. Scotland would also be an attractive site. I sometimes get a bit fed up with Scottish Members—who seem to have a down on the rest of the United Kingdom—but Scotland is a beautiful region, although it rains a lot.

Mr. Fabricant: The Olympic games in the year 2000 will be held in the beautiful city of Sydney. Is my hon. Friend aware that the amount of rainfall in Sydney during the Australian winter is substantially higher than that in Manchester in summer? I wonder whether the International Olympic Committee realises that the Olympic games will be held in Sydney during its winter.

Mr. Amess: I had not realised that. It is probably a bit late for the committee to reverse its decision, but I shall write immediately to my Australian friends and ask them to explain the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon discussed the national lottery. Conservative Members are guilty of allowing the Opposition to get away with murder on the issue. It was the Conservative party's idea to have a national lottery. The Johnny-come-latelies in the Opposition are adopting a lottery-praising attitude, but the Conservative Government were responsible for it, and it will be a great success.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that, after the Third Reading debate on the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, both the Opposition parties voted against it?

Mr. Amess: I am aware of that. One reason why I spent a fair bit of time in that debate was that I wanted the national lottery headquarters to be located in my constituency of Basildon. I am delighted that Camelot has been awarded the national lottery franchise. I have already corresponded with it to find out how it intends to run it.

I have not given up hope that Basildon will be entitled to some of the work that will be generated. First Data Resources is a wonderful company in my constituency, although its headquarters is in Omaha, Nebraska. It produces credit cards and has the expertise necessary for the production of, and the machinery behind, a national lottery.

The national lottery will produce £2 billion. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon discussed the ways in which the money could be spent. I do not want to go for the glamorous ways that have been mentioned. I am very involved with the National Association of Boys' Clubs in my constituency and proud to be the president of Basildon boys' club, Vange boys' club and other such organisations, which are run by wonderful people who give their time and turn out good citizens. It is an unglamorous form of leisure activity, but a valuable one.

It would be wrong if all the money from the national lottery were to find its way to high-profile leisure activities. I warn my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall seek to ensure that some of the resources from the lottery go to boys' clubs.

In his magnificent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon mentioned cable television, the one issue on which I disagreed with him. I am not an overly keen television fan. Most of us who have small children know that, by and large, they watch too much television. Turning it off continually does not stop them switching it on again when parents are out of the room. So much of what we see on television is rubbish.

That said, I was delighted when United Artists announced that it would locate its headquarters in my constituency, which could create about 800 jobs, an issue of concern to all hon. Members. However, I caution hon. Members whose constituencies do not have not cable. United Artists did not warn me—my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon has had a private word with me about cable—that every person's pavement would be dug up. That is all well and good if it is put back in good order, but not all pavements are grey or black. The modern style is sometimes to have a maroon pavement.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend also aware that, although some cable trenchers repair the pavements well, there can be serious damage to the roots of established trees? After four or five years, the trees decay. There are now guidelines—sadly, far too few cable operators adhere to them—on how to lay a trench without damaging trees and roads.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend is on to a good point. When it all started, I thought that there would be isolated incidents. However, people's water mains have been broken by drilling that has not been done properly. Power cables have been spoilt and there have been terrible rows about the resurfacing.

Perhaps I did not listen carefully at the time, because I did not realise that there would be channelling outside everyone's house. We have just gone through two election campaigns—the local and the European. When I knocked on people's doors, I found that they wanted to talk not about the social chapter, but about their roads being dug up.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon that, as a Conservative, I believe in choice. Although I understand the benefits of cable, I believe that there is a serious duty on the contractors to repair the roads properly. If my constituency is anything to go by, the contractors have not discharged their obligations to the high level that I should have expected.

Yes, I will continue to support private enterprise, but I do not think that it is fair for many of my constituents to wake up in the morning and find that they cannot get out of their drive because a digger has been dumped. There are many such examples; I am sad to say that they are not isolated examples.

Mr. Simon Coombs: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I can give him one or two pieces of consolation. My constituency went through this business 10 years ago; it was one of the first to be substantially cabled. Many of the problems that my hon. Friend has

described so vividly were visited on us at that time. Experience usually teaches contractors how to avoid some of the mistakes.

On behalf of his constituents, my hon. Friend must take up vigorously with the cable company concerned the problems that are being experienced. There is a difficulty in management. The cable companies themselves are anxious to get on with the business of providing a service, and the contractors, who are often brought from other parts of the country, do not have quite the right attitude some of the time, I am afraid to say.

The problems have been addressed in other areas. There is an excellent organisation, the Cable Television Association, to which my hon. Friend should address his complaints, so that they can then be referred to the local cable company, with a little pressure to ensure that things are done properly. The nice thing is that, although there is a blemish on the pavement, the value of properties increases when people realise that they have access to cable.

Mr. Amess: I am encouraged and reassured by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon, and I shall take his advice. I do not mean my next remark unkindly; I have been trying to sort out people's problems with cabling for more than four months. The matter has gone on for a lot longer than I would have hoped.

In a debate such as this one, it is wrong for us not to mention the disabled. In their competitive sports in my constituency, the disabled are not only the equals of able-bodied people, but excel themselves. I am proud that, in my constituency, we have a young fellow called Andrew Blake, who won a number of Olympic golds in the Paraplegic Olympics. We also have a wonderful lady, Betty Jefferies, who also achieved a great deal. I pay a warm tribute to all the disabled groups in my constituency.

I do not know whether the Department of National Heritage has pushed vigorously the benefits of Sport Aid. My hon. Friend the Minister probably does not entirely welcome my raising the matter now; I do not know how much money is left. However, I thank him and his officials personally for the way in which my constituency has benefited from that money. I am delighted to say that Bowers United, a local football team, as a result of assistance from the Department of National Heritage, now has floodlights. As a result, the club will be in the FA cup this year for the first time in its history. It was always of a very high standard, but it was not eligible because it did not have floodlights. The grant of what I believe was £45,000 made available through Sports Aid has made many of my constituents very happy.

Of course, no constituency Member is always entirely satisfied. That is why I make no apology for my plea now for an organisation in my constituency which is intent on building the Essex international table tennis centre. I know that table tennis is not quite as popular as it was some years ago—I remember that Desmond Douglas was a champion, and one or two other people. It is the intention of a number of my constituents to build that centre of excellence in Basildon.

We have been told by the Foundation for Sport and the Arts that it is considering a grant application from the organisers for £150,000. The Eastern region sports council —headed by a wonderful footballer from West Ham, Trevor Brooking—will be supplying a further £100,000. But to make the project happen, we really are dependent on the foundation advancing the money. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister if, through his Department, he would do everything that he possibly can to assist us with our application.

Moving on quickly, I take this opportunity to join the hon. Member Newham, North-West in his remarks on the world cup and football generally. It is terrible that we are watching a world cup with no England team involved. I am not going to talk about the previous manager, because I want to be positive about the way forward.

Last November, I tried to introduce in this House a ten-minute rule Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North had a go yesterday with a Bill on the subject of identity cards. I support them, although my ten-minute rule Bill was for a voluntary scheme. I wanted to amend the Football Spectators Act 1989. We make a great mistake in the House if we think that hooliganism has gone away. I do not believe that it has. We must not forget the disgraceful scenes at Millwall a few weeks ago, when fans rioted after an eliminator.

Never mind what the Europeans do in their countries. It is up to them through the European Community to put their own houses in order. We should lead the way in this country, and we must look at the passport situation very carefully.

Conservative-controlled Basildon district council runs wonderful sports and leisure facilities in my constituency. There is an example of a good council working with the private sector. There is the Eversley leisure centre which was opened in 87, the Markham Chase leisure centre opened in 1989, and the Pitsea welcome centre, which was opened in 1981. We have a number of wonderful swimming pools, and never let anyone forget the magnificent sportswomen and men in my constituency.

Fatima Whitbread lives just outside the constituency and supports all our local leisure activities. Basildon produced last year's winner of the London marathon—Eammon Martin. He is a wonderful example of all that is good in British sport today. He did not win this year, but he ran extremely well. He visited the House of Commons on Friday, and we were pleased to have him here with us.

There are marvellous golf courses in Basildon, and the Kingswood squash centre—the finest squash centre in Europe—which is run by the Guppy family. Another golf course that has just opened is called Stockbrook Manor, which very generously made me vice-president. All I have to do now is learn to play golf. It is a wonderful facility, and I know that many of my constituents will appreciate it.

A wonderful event took place yesterday in Pitsea hall park in Basildon, attended by 4,000 constituents, the Henry Bear teddy bears' picnic. That event may not, sadly, have been reported in the national newspapers today, because we know that they are not too interested in the good news. That picnic was a wonderful example of a group of organisations working together, in particular PPA, which recently held a tea party in the House, Home Start and the district council. The event was attended by mums and dads, who brought along their children aged between two and five. They all enjoyed the leisure facilities on offer.

I am particularly proud of what will happen in Basildon on Saturday and Sunday, when a huge rally of young people will be held. The event, known as Positive Youth, was the idea of Mr. Jackaman, of Kathleen Ferrier crescent, Basildon. He came along to my surgery two years ago and said, "David, I am fed up with all the bad publicity that

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young people in this country get. I want to have a celebration over a weekend of all the marvellous activities in which they are involved."

We will have to wait to see whether that event makes the headlines in our national newspapers, but it is good news about young people. It will offer a range of activities including running, jumping and swimming. The Guides, the Brownies and the Red Cross will be there. I am delighted to note that MK Electrics is among the sponsors together with First Data Resources. We have now decided to twin Basildon with Omaha, Nebraska, because of First Data Resources. It has generously donated three prizes for three young people to visit Omaha for three weeks to learn about its leisure facilities.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon on allowing us to debate leisure activities. It is a tragedy that at the moment we are so adept at talking ourselves down rather than talking ourselves up. We have much to be proud of. This is a very great country. I hope that the entire nation will unite behind the efforts of our leisure industry to promote this country not only to our good citizens but to the rest of the world.

1.7 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I could not possibly begin my speech without paying tribute to the wonderful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). Before today, I had not naturally thought of Basildon as the next venue for the Olympic games. The more I thought about it, however, the more evident that possibility became. My hon. Friend has run a marathon performance there for many years. Every hurdle he has met he has leapt across and he has shown that no hurdle is too high for him. He goes on vaulting to new heights every time he speaks on behalf of his constituents.

One thing we know for certain is that, added to that list of formidable stadiums in Basildon will shortly by the Amess stadium, in honour of the man who has shown a level of energy, enthusiasm and commitment to his constituency that has been matched by few other hon. Members.

Mr. Tony Banks: A mess stadium.

Mr. Hendry: I heard that sedentary intervention and I can understand why the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is angry, because the greatest tourist attraction in his constituency is the northern sewage outlet. That is scarcely in competition with even the most meagre tower block in Basildon or any of the beautiful sights in my constituency.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman should have a care, because the northern sewage outfall walk is a wonderful, almost rural walk. I invite him to join me in sauntering along it.

Mr. Hendry: I am immensely grateful for that invitation. When the hon. Gentleman described it as a "green" walk, I wanted to know why it was green, and whether something coming out of the sewer outlet causes it to be that colour. I should be delighted to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency and make his constituents realise that they should follow the Conservative approach to tourism. When they compare what is on offer in their constituency with what is on offer in Conservative constituencies, they will realise that there is no comparison between the two.

My constituency is just outside Manchester and I was desperately saddened that we did not win the Olympic bid for the year 2000. One reason why those games went to Sydney was that many of those who would have backed Manchester felt that they had to stop Peking winning at all costs, and so opted for the city which they felt stood the best chance of doing that. Manchester's case was much more strongly put than the end result gave it credit for. Had the media attention paid as much attention, before the decision was made, to explaining and pushing Manchester's case as they paid afterwards to explaining why Manchester had lost, we would have had a better chance of winning votes.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on initiating this important debate. It is appropriate that we should have it now, as we are in the middle of the British leisure season, the most famous in the entire world. This week and next, we have Wimbledon —it may not last until the end of next week, given the way it is going; next week, we shall have Henley; Ascot was held recently; and Glyndebourne will go on through the summer. Those events give us the most famous leisure season in the world. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) is scoffing. Those events are not just wonderful for the people who attend them; they are watched by millions, not just in this country but throughout the world. The Wimbledon final will be the most widely watched sporting event in the world on that day. Those events do a tremendous amount of credit to Britain and its image overseas.

Ms Mowlam: May I reassure the hon. Gentleman that I was not scoffing at the events but thinking how those events change in national importance. As the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) said, we must consider the difficult question of national coverage—when a national event should remain national and how to keep it on our national terrestrial television so that it is the cement that keeps our society together. I must admit that I had a little snigger at Glyndebourne, wonderful place though it is, because people in Redcar get little opportunity to see opera. That is not good for people.

Mr. Hendry: I agree with the hon. Lady but just down the road from her is Opera North, and the number of facilities is increasing. Emphasis has been put on touring opera to ensure that her constituents have a chance to see some of the wonderful opera that is available.

I was intrigued by the hon. Lady's speech, although I picked up few policy points from it. She mentioned the number of bank holidays in this country, but it was not clear whether she was promising more under a Labour Government as a carrot, implying that if people voted Labour they could have every day off or saying that businesses would suffer as a result of more bank holidays. Or perhaps she was saying that, because we have fewer bank holidays than other countries in Europe, we have a greater commitment to our work and the success of our country. She simply raised the matter as an interesting subject. I agree that it is interesting, but it would be nice to know whether the Opposition have a policy on it.

Ms Mowlam: With a Government whose policies are drifting, we have learnt not to be specific about our policies

two years from an election because if we are, the Government will simply nick them. I was trying to highlight four or five important points that need to be dealt with for the good of our tourist industry and to give pointers in the hope that things will be done, because the industry is crucial for our growth and development. On many of the points that I made, I was agreeing with the hon. Member for Swindon, who introduced the debate.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. It is helpful to know that the reason why the Opposition do not dare to have any policies is that somebody might agree with them. I am sure that, when the Labour party comes to put forward policies, if Conservative Members find that there is any element in them that is favourable, the Opposition will not simply stick to their gut reaction of opposing everything at every opportunity, which happens too often.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for letting me intervene. Before the intervention of the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), he was mentioning the coverage of Wimbledon and the final. The hon. Gentleman might be interested to learn that during the two weeks of Wimbledon, the BBC is providing five simultaneous channels of continuous coverage from the different courts to 18 different countries, with all the technology that that involves. I had the opportunity to see, as recently as two or three days ago, the way that Spanish Television, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the Australian Broadcasting Commission and M-Net in Johannesburg are covering, not only the finals, but the two weeks of Wimbledon, day by day, ball by ball. Is not that one of the things that promote Britain throughout the world?

Mr. Hendry: My hon. Friend is right. That will be an immensely popular service in every country that I can think of apart from Germany, which probably would not wish to watch Wimbledon.

The motion correctly points out the great role that has been played by the Department of National Heritage. My constituency has more to be grateful for on that front than almost any other constituency in the country. The predecessor of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State stepped in with a compulsory repairs order to save the grade 1-listed Crescent in Buxton —the pivotal centre of Buxton. A £1 million pound grant has now been made available through English Heritage. Thanks to the Government's intervention and the money that they have made available through English Heritage and the national heritage memorial fund, a building which was falling apart—which had decayed almost to the point at which it could not have been saved—has had its future secured.

Money has also been put in to restore the Slopes, which are the wonderful slopes that come down from the top of the town to the front of the Crescent. Those two restorations combined will do more than anything to make Buxton one of the most appealing tourist attractions in the country.

I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) occasionally engage in a little bit of rivalry about which constituency attracts the most tourists and which is falling into the sea most rapidly. But both their constituencies combined have fewer visitors a year than does High Peak: 22 million visitors a year visit the national park—more than are received by any national park in the world outside Mount Fuji in Japan. People flock not only from the surrounding cities of Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Derby and Birmingham but from places throughout the world to look at its stunning beauty.

Although the Department for National Heritage deserves tremendous credit, the greatest credit goes to the individual people who have made that success. It goes to the hoteliers and people who run bed and breakfasts, who have made the national park a welcoming place to come and who ensure that people return time after time to our award-winning hotels. It goes to the people who run the sporting activities, the people who harnessed the natural beauty of the Peak district with man's talent and man's ability to take part in sport. It goes to the way in which the reservoirs are used for sailing, windsurfing and other water sports. It goes to the way in which we put money into sports clubs, rugby clubs and cricket—into the range of sports that make English life what it is.

I give tremendous credit and gratitude to the support that we have had from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. The sporting clubs in my constituency have had many tens of thousands of pounds' worth of support from the FSA. That support has enabled them to expand, to bring in new people, to provide a worthwhile activity in which young people can become involved. That support is tremendously welcome and we are grateful.

We have in the area some of the finest treasures in the country. At Chatsworth house, just outside my constituency, the Duchess of Devonshire has shown other stately home owners how to run their houses—not only in the best interests of those home owners, who want to secure their heritage in their homes, but for the benefit of people who want to enjoy them and who like a good day out. I believe that the Duchess of Devonshire was invited by Her Majesty to give her advice on how to open Buckingham palace to the public. I hope that Her Majesty will not have the same trouble as the duchess. A man came up to the duchess in the grounds of Chatsworth and said, "Here, lady—you're not allowed dogs in here." He did not realise that she owned the place and could probably take her dogs where she wished. I trust that Her Majesty will not have a similar problem in her own garden.

Chatsworth house is a wonderful jewel, and next door, is Haddon hall, owned by the Duke of Rutland. Those two wonderful, historic families have preserved a jewel of this country's treasure, which can be enjoyed by millions of people over the years.

Mr. Tony Banks: They are stuffed with bourgeois layabouts.

Mr. Hendry: In Buxton there is a marvellous opera house. No doubt the hon. Member for Newham, North-West thinks that that is stuffed with bourgeois layabouts. It is not case; it is a small jewel of an opera house—a 900 seater. I invite the hon. Gentleman to come. After I have walked along his sewage outfall with him, I hope that he will come with me to enjoy the Buxton opera house—

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the champagne on the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Hendry: The champagne will most certainly be on me because I realise that when the hon. Gentleman comes

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to my constituency the scales will fall from his eyes and a vision will open before him of how much more beautiful life could be if he lived in my constituency.

Tremendous effort is put in by people who, weekend after weekend, give of their own time. The Victorian weekend in Glossop brings the town together—residents celebrate its unique facilities and delightful assets. Young girls from all over the area participate in the May queen festival in Hayfield, and I am given the joyful role of judging the competition.

We also have the wonderful and historic well-dressing events in Derbyshire. Our wells are the source of our water and the source of our prosperity, so we give great thanks for that supply. We also give thanks to North West Water and Severn Trent Water for purifying the water and delivering it to us. There are great celebrations of village life in my constituency and such events ensure that, year after year, people return to see what we have to offer.

We must beware that we do not kill the golden goose. We could do so either through over-bureaucracy or by putting too much pressure on people through organisations such as the Peak national park. We could damage our assets. Of course, there is a case to be made for managing better the 22 million people who visit my constituency and for ensuring that the traffic flow is kept down so that we do not have traffic queues in the constituency that are worse than those in the city centres from which people have moved away.

We must ensure that we carry the people with us. The Peak national park and the Peak tourism partnership must not impose their way of life on the people who live and work in those constituencies, at their expense. When we make districts conservation areas, it should be a selling exercise. People should not be told that their district is to be a conservation area whether they like it or not. People should want their district to be a conservation area because they perceive the benefits. Sadly, that is not the case now and there is a greater need for organisations such as the Peak national park to carry the people with them.

If the district is to be successful, we must strike a balance between the interests of the visitors and the interests of those who live and work there. We must balance the interests of the hang gliders against those of people who live round about. I tried hang gliding, but I was not very successful. I hovered about three inches off the ground and did not make any progress. At least I missed the overhead pylons. Residents in Castleton are fed up with people jumping off the top of Mam Tor, a mountain in the middle of the constituency, and landing in the middle of the village, disrupting the traffic, frightening the sheep and bouncing off the power cables in between. If we participate in sports in rural areas, we must ensure that we respect the interests of those who live there.

Last year, I introduced a Bill in the House to enable footpaths to be closed in the national park during times of particularly high fire risk. The previous year, hundreds of acres of moorland were devastated by fire. Under existing law, we cannot close footpaths even when we know that one bit of glass dropped, one careless match or one cigarette end can cause carnage—damaging the heather for years to come and setting back the wildlife for generations.

Hundreds of people in my constituency earn their living by quarrying. Certainly, we need to be concerned about the natural beauty of the area, but Buxton Lime Industries, for instance, has the biggest quarry in Europe. If we tell such companies that they have no right to be there because we have changed our environmental approach, the very reason for the existence of the villages in the area—the reason why people moved there in the first place—will be taken away from them. So the right balance must be struck.

Deregulation also remains an issue. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, on the sterling work that he has done towards tackling excessive bureaucracy—those rules that we all knew were rubbish but which were forced on people who run bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hotels and tourist attractions. Much is being done, but I urge the Minister—I do not imagine that he needs much urging—to nerve himself to continue the fight against regulation with unrelenting vigour, so that we can tackle all this gobbledegook and sweep away ridiculous rules.

There has been progress. When we last debated this matter, significant attention was devoted to the silly signs denoting animal attractions, which all had to show an elephant. For the sake of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, I am wearing my elephant tie today, in recognition of his and my great interest in elephants, but I do not want to see them on every signpost for flamingo parks, whale sanctuaries and so on. There has been sensible progress in this area, but if we want a truly dynamic tourist industry we must sweep away the regulations that hinder it.

My final point relates to farmers—in an area such as High Peak, the guardians of the countryside. They conserve it and they ensure that we can enjoy all that beauty in perpetuity. Perhaps we do not get the system quite right, however. We give grants to farmers who put up stone walls, but if a farmer has maintained his dry stone walls year in, year out, he will not get a penny in grant. A farmer who allows his walls to fall down will get a grant from the Government to put them up again. If, as we must, we give grants for conservation purposes, the focus should be changed to reward farmers who maintain their walls and barns in good condition. We want the countryside to be maintained in a way that keeps it beautiful and shows that mankind can improve on nature, harnessing natural resources for the benefit of those who live in an area or want to visit it.

In many ways, High Peak is a beacon for the leisure and tourist industries. I am always glad to invite my colleagues to visit it; I hope that they will always feel free to do so. I am grateful for having had the chance to make a small contribution to this important debate.

1.27 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): It is a great privilege to take part in this debate and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), whose brave initiative it was to initiate it. It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), a near neighbour of mine. He mentioned Castleton; I have not hang-glided off Mam Tor, but I have climbed it and afterwards enjoyed sustenance at Ye Olde Nag's Head, an excellent restaurant and hostelry in Castleton—which, of course, is not far from Buxton. Although I have not recently visited the opera house there, I have been to the pub next door to it. In its own special

way, it, too, has a great deal of style which reflects the general character of Buxton and of the hon. Member who represents that great town.

I shall speak only briefly, on four topics. I should like to discuss broadcasting, to touch on investment in tourism, to talk about the different sorts of holidays we can enjoy in the United Kingdom, and to discuss the great city of Lichfield, which occupies a small part of my 34-mile long constituency but whose population accounts for 35 or 40 per cent. of the total.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon was absolutely right to talk at some length about broadcasting, although some might have said that it was not the sort of subject to be mentioned in a debate on leisure. As my hon. Friend said, on average United Kingdom citizens watch television for three hours and 45 minutes each day. That is far too long when there are other things that they could be doing, but it is a smidgen compared with the time that US citizens spend watching television—about seven hours a day. That shows the lack of imagination of some American citizens, or a lack of alternative interesting activities to draw them away from television. It is certainly not a reflection on the quality of television there. I was a student in the United States and I later worked there, and I know that it is not a patch on the television that is available in the United Kingdom.

The Select Committee on National Heritage is currently looking not only at broadcasting but at sport and its broadcast coverage. I do not wish to pre-empt the Committee's conclusions because final decisions have yet to be made. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) spoke about listings—the sports that are confined to terrestrial broadcasters. The Wimbledon finals are an example. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak spoke of the importance of Wimbledon in promoting Britain abroad. While at Wimbledon two or three days ago, I noted that about 20 per cent. of the people walking around seemed to be speaking foreign languages. That demonstrates that not only does Wimbledon promote Britain abroad among people who watch the games in their own countries, but it attracts people to the United Kingdom. Initially Wimbledon may have drawn German visitors but, sadly, many of them will have left by now.

The BBC is broadcasting on five channels simultaneously to broadcasters in different parts of the world, and that is a great credit to the BBC. Very few broadcasting organisations would be capable of doing that. For much of the time, we in the United Kingdom see only one of those channels, although sometimes BBC1 and BBC2 simultaneously cover different aspects of Wimbledon. Three additional feeds go to various parts of the world.

We shall find out in the next week or two, when the Select Committee on National Heritage makes its recommendations, whether the listings will be abolished or expanded or whether subscription services will come under the purview of the listings. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Minister will read that report in detail, as will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, because I know that they both read Select Committee reports with great interest. No doubt they act on them.

It is unfortunate that people get cheap laughs at party conferences by referring to the BBC as the bolshevik broadcasting corporation. That is not the case: many people who work at the BBC are not socialists but Conservatives. The BBC does an excellent job, as do Independent Television and other United Kingdom broadcasters.

I agree with the hon. Member for Redcar when she says that not enough research is being done in investment in tourism. It would make an excellent subject for a doctoral thesis and I invite universities in various parts of the United Kingdom to encourage students to undertake a doctoral thesis in the cost benefit of investing in tourism. I believe that there is a multiplier effect and if the state—the taxpayer—were to invest more in the promotion of British tourism abroad, alongside the private sector, it would not be investment down the drain. I believe, but I do not know because the facts are not available, that it would generate a huge return in money raised through the Exchequer, from corporation tax on our hotel groups, from income tax from those people employed in the leisure industry and also from VAT as people pay for their hotel bills and go on rides, such as the biggest helter-skelter in the United Kingdom, if not the biggest in Europe, which happens to be in the domain of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson). I must point out, however, that the most exciting, even if not the tallest, helter-skelter in the United Kingdom is the Nemesis ride at Alton Towers, which is not far at all from my own patch of Mid-Staffordshire.

I therefore invite universities, other places of higher learning and institutions that conduct such research to try to perform an analysis. We need hard data. What is the percentage return that we can expect from promoting Britain abroad? How much money is raised by tourists coming to the United Kingdom? Guesses are made and the guesses may well be informed. On the other hand, they may not be. I agree with the hon. Member for Redcar when she says that she suspects that we may well be underestimating the amount of money that enters the country—directly and indirectly—from tourism. That area needs to be explored in much more detail.

There are many different sorts of holidays available in the United Kingdom. It saddens me when I meet American friends who say, "We've visited the United Kingdom. We've seen the UK." I ask them where they have been. They say, "We've been to London and we've been to Stratford-on-Avon." Sometimes they say that they have been to Blackpool, but rarely. Sometimes they say that they have been to our great university towns. What do they mean by that? They mean Oxford or Cambridge, but what about Durham? Durham has one of our oldest universities. I did not go there, I have no axe to grind there, but Durham is a beautiful city and yet, it saddens me when so few people visit it. It saddens me, too, when one walks around the Cotswolds. Stratford-on-Avon is almost sinking under the weight of American tourists. Yet when one visits beautiful villages such as Broadway, they are virtually empty of tourists from abroad. They are filled with tourists from the UK, but I rarely see tourists from abroad in such villages.

It is tremendously important to promote other parts of the United Kingdom. Whenever I go to the United States, I make a point of touring around various parts that even American friends say they have never visited. It is also regrettable that too many Brits fail to visit other parts of the British Isles. Two Christmases ago, I went to Scotland to tour the area. At the tender age of 42, I visited Scotland for the first time. That is a shame, but I am trying hard to

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rectify the situation. At present, my knowledge and geography of the United States of America is far better than that of the United Kingdom.

Different types of holidays are being promoted in the UK. People undertake cycling holidays. Britain boasts one of the largest canal systems in Europe. I went for the first time on a canal boat holiday for a long weekend a few weeks ago. I travelled from Flore in Northamptonshire to Leamington Spa in Warwickshire and back. What a marvellous experience that was. At one point, looking at the map, I could tell that I was within 150 yards of the M1 motorway. Yet I could have been in a totally different world. In fact, in many ways, I was in a completely different world and living at a completely different pace of life. Such holidays should be promoted more. It was a great pleasure to discover that many of the other people travelling on narrow boats were not from the United Kingdom. Many of them were American. I do not want hon. Members to think that I am criticising Americans—far from it. I simply pick on them as the archetypal visitor to the United Kingdom. We not only export canal boat holidays, in the sense that they attract overseas visitors, but the largest canal boat cruise company in France is British owned. I like to think that British people occasionally go to France—after all, it is a fellow member of the European Union—and that many of them are taking their holidays with a British company, so that the money comes back to the UK one way or the other.

There are other unusual holidays. One involves visiting different castles by bicycle or canal boat. Warwick is one of the best castles to visit, and it is in the private sector. It has been imaginatively and tastefully developed. One can also take holidays in hotels in the form of mystery weekends, at which one has to determine who is the murderer in a scenario in which Hercule Poirot appears. That is uniquely British.

My own patch is the city of Lichfield. My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) said that he was a successor to the first Member of Parliament for Scarborough, who was elected in 1295. When my hon. Friend said that, I rushed off to the Library and discovered that I pre-date my hon. Friend not just in my birthday but in the sense that the first Member of Parliament for Lichfield attended at Oxford on 15 November 1213 to meet there in Parliament. Unfortunately, the Library was unable to tell me his name. However, the first recorded Members of Parliament for Lichfield sat in the Parliament of 1304. They were Vincentius de Hulton and Nicholaus Clericus. I suppose that with a name like Fabricant, which I never pronounce with a French accent, I follow that Norman style. My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough follows Robertus le Covoner and Johannes Hamund, who are linked in many ways with the name Sykes.

Lichfield cathedral is 800 years old and attracts many visitors. In the near vicinity there are Alton Towers and The Belfry, where the Ryder Cup was recently staged. Lichfield also recently held folk and jazz festivals and will shortly stage the Lichfield arts festival. It is interesting that many able people were born in Lichfield but subsequently left. I live in the home of Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles Darwin, and the actor David Garrick was born in Lichfield. Ashmol, founder of the Ashmolean museum in Oxford, was also born in Lichfield, and Dr. Johnson was born and educated there. Even you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, visited Lichfield to chair or address a mock Parliament in our ancient Guildhall, for which I thank you. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage will visit Lichfield tomorrow and I look forward to that event, as do the people of Lichfield, with great interest and excitement.The annual Bower festival in Lichfield dates back to the 13th century. Morris dancers and the Member of Parliament, sheriff and mayor of Lichfield all take part. Interesting people come along: I hope that some day the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) will take part in this exciting event.

Britain offers overseas visitors a gamut of activities and places. It is sad that while certain parts of the United Kingdom are sinking under the weight of those visitors, others are not often visited. It is also sad that certain unusual holidays do not attract overseas visitors; they need to be promoted more. I believe that investment by the United Kingdom in overseas promotion of British activities—together with private investment—is well worth while. I hope that universities will take up the challenge that I have offered and research further into the moneys that investment in tourism could return to our economy.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on securing the debate and choosing its subject: the House is in his debt. He gave us a marvellously sweeping and comprehensive view of many of the activities for which the Department of National Heritage is responsible and, in doing so, made an extremely important point about the Department as a whole.

Most of the debate has concerned tourism, quite rightly. I believe that, before the Department was set up after the last general election, we had had no debates on tourism for four or five years; yet, within the time of the current Parliament, I have taken part in two major tourism debates. The other day, we had an important debate on the arts in which the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) took part, and my predecessor participated in another debate on tourism. I think that the establishment of the Department of National Heritage has focused the minds of hon. Members and Governments, and I hope that it has had the same effect on the leisure industry, particularly tourism. For that alone, I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon.

The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) properly conveyed the apologies of her hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) for his absence. I should put on record that I appreciated his courtesy in telling me that he would not be here. We value his contributions to tourism and sport debates very much, not least in his capacity as a former boxing champion; we miss the advice that he would have given today, although we greatly envy his being in the United States to watch the world cup. I know that he wanted to attend an Adjournment debate the other night and normally he attends such debates assiduously. I should add that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks)—also an assiduous attender of tourism debates—is abroad on parliamentary business. We miss the contribution that he, too, would have made.

Near the beginning of his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon used a very good phrase: he said that we had become "an earplug society". I took him to mean that we listen too much to Sony Walkman personal stereos, as well as watching too much television and too many videos. Far be it from any Government to say how much time people should spend watching television and videos, but it is extremely important that our children should not spend so much time watching television and videos and playing computer games that they do not take proper physical exercise or play enough sport. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon said, one of the things that I am most keen to do is to ensure that children have proper opportunities to play sport, especially team games in school. My Department and the Department for Education are in the process of producing a joint report on what we should do to increase sport in schools. Sir Ron Dearing has produced his report and we are looking forward to hearing people's comments on it by the end of next month.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon mentioned the future of the British Broadcasting Corporation and paid it some well-deserved compliments. The hon. Member for Redcar also mentioned the BBC. All hon. Members will know that a White Paper on the BBC will be produced shortly and until that moment comes I shall let the matter rest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon launched a gentle attack—as attacks go in this place—on the arm's-length principle as it applies to the Arts Council. Of course, I take his point that Ministers often get the blame for decisions that are taken by the Arts Council. My hon. Friend mentioned the case of the London orchestras last year. Although there may be occasions when, had I been taking the decision, it would have been different from that of the Arts Council, it is common ground among hon. Members of all parties that, on balance, we should continue to adhere to the arm's-length principle and that, although from time to time the Arts Council, the regional arts boards, the sports councils and others make decisions with which we do not agree, the principle is worth sticking by.

My hon. Friend then moved on to the national lottery. As he rightly said, it will revolutionise the way in which we consider many projects that will be funded by the lottery. A number of hon. Members said that tourism will not be directly eligible for lottery funds, but tourism receives a substantial indirect benefit from the five areas that will directly benefit from the national lottery—sport, the arts, charities, the built heritage and the millennium fund. I hope that those involved in tourism will get together with others and apply for lottery funds. Clearly, the built heritage is at the heart of what is attractive about this country. I hope that those involved in the tourist industry will get together with others and come up with projects that will improve our built heritage, which will in turn attract more tourists to any given area.

It is worth making another point about the lottery. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon said that he was concerned about the relationship between capital spending and revenue spending from lottery funding. He was right to make that point. In the past few months, I have gone round every sports region in this country. At every meeting, the issue that people were most concerned about was the relationship between capital and revenue funding. Although sports projects would, rightly, be eligible for lottery funding, the people to whom I talked were afraid that, because it was all capital spending, we would find ourselves building, let us say, a load of new leisure centres with no money to pay people to run them or for maintenance and repairs. One statistic that I picked up somewhere along the regional sports trail was that it cost £200 an hour to keep an ice rink frozen. That is serious money. It is no use putting up the capital spending to build the ice rink and then not having the revenue cash to deal with it.

I am glad that as a result of many of the representations to me and to other Ministers, we have now issued directions whereby it is possible, when a capital project is to be funded by the lottery, to make arrangements whereby revenue funding will follow it. There cannot be revenue funding for a project if there is no capital funding. In the case of the leisure centre, which I gave an instance of a moment ago, there can be revenue funding either by way of an endowment trust or by way of direct funding from, let us say, the Sports Council. That is a very happy compromise and I am glad that we have reached it. It may turn out that that is wrong; it could be wrong either way. We may find that the lottery money is silting up too much and that we shall wish to go back to more capital funding. I do not think so, but it may happen. In one, two or three years' time, we will look at the matter. We will keep an open mind on the subject. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon feels that the important central point that he raised has been dealt with satisfactorily, as appears to be the case for the moment—at least until we have more experience to look at.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon also mentioned the film industry. Nobody could have done more over the past months than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take advice on what should be done about the film industry. My right hon. Friend has seen representatives from almost every possible branch of the industry. He is considering what to do—whether there is more Government help that could be given or not. He will make his announcement shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon mentioned sporting scholarships; that is a very important point. Sporting scholarships would not, of course, be eligible for lottery funding directly, for the reasons that I have just given. However, I undertake to look carefully at what my hon. Friend has said. It may be that before the summer recess, I shall have the chance to make an announcement about what we intend to do about the Sports Councils. I certainly very much hope that we shall be able to do that by the summer recess. My hon. Friend may then be able to put his question to me in that context.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon also made the point about the inflation-linking of the level above which the Sports Councils have to come to my Department to ask permission to spend money. I will look at that point; I am not entirely convinced. The recent reports by the National Audit Office and others have made me look extremely cautiously at the way in which the Sports Councils and other bodies spend money. I undertake to look at that point. As I said, I hope that the Sports Councils announcement will be made before the summer recess.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon then passed on to an important section of his speech—the section on tourism. I do not think that any hon. Member these days needs to be reminded of the importance of that industry. I was very struck by the fact that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) said that she would not run through all the statistics again about the industry involving 1.5

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

million people and having a turnover of £30 billion. We all understand why. It is significant that only two or three years ago, she would not have said that. It is because, quite rightly, we have had so much concentration on tourism that people know the statistics. Certainly five or 10 years ago, those statistics would not have been at the top of everyone's mind. That is a tribute, I hope, to what the Department of National Heritage, among others, has done to explain the importance of tourism as a major industry in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) referred to my being an industry Minister and he was absolutely right. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) suggested that we might put the section on tourism at the front of our annual report in future. That is a very good idea and I see no reason why it should not be done. It is certainly true that for the first time ever we have a Department—the Department of National Heritage—in which tourism is the single most important economic element. I am acutely conscious of that. The fact that tourism has played such an important part in today's debate shows that the House is very conscious of that fact. I am also acutely conscious of the fact that the hon. Member for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks) has an important motion on which he would like to speak. I do not want to take up too much of the time of the House, but this has been such a wide-ranging and valuable debate that I could certainly take up all of the time available.

Mr. Simon Coombs: My hon. Friend has covered my points in great detail. He has missed only one, and I should like to give him the chance to respond to it. I raised the matter of the private sector and its relationship with the various funding bodies under the lottery in relation to sport and heritage. Will he clarify the position of the private sector in respect of its entitlement to lottery proceeds for joint funding?

Mr. Sproat: I shall do my best to clarify it. I say "do my best" not out of false modesty, but because it is a grey area. As I understand it, the National Heritage Memorial Fund is prevented by primary legislation from giving money to private sector organisations. For instance, if one owned a stately home or a pier—Hastings pier was an example which I looked at the other day have—one would have to turn oneself into a charity before being eligible for certain sectors of money. That is certainly true of any funds that somebody applied for from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

In other areas, such as sport, it is a question of what the royal charter of the Sports Council allows it to do. As I understand it, the Sports Council is of the opinion that its charter may allow it to give money to partnerships that include private sector profit-making bodies. That will be something for the Sports Council to go over again with its lawyers, no doubt before the first applications come forward. That is also the case for the Arts Council, and so on.

It is a very important point. We want a proper partnership with bodies that have applied for the national lottery funds, and those may be local authorities, organisations with private sector involvement, charities or whatever. The key question is—is the lottery money going to be used for the "public good"? Clearly those are words which can be defined in a number of ways, but basically that is the key element. I very much hope that, certainly as far as sport is concerned, it will prove that we can look at private sector bids as part of a partnership. My hon. Friend mentioned the David Lloyd tennis centre, but I cannot not tell him off the top of my head whether that body is eligible or not.

My hon. Friend has makes an important point, and it is a grey area which the bodies will be looking at in the coming months. If we find that they are prevented from involving the private sector bodies in partnership, we will look again at the legislation and see whether it ought to be changed. I am not saying that it should be changed, but we will look at it.

Had I more time, I would have spoken more on the position of the English tourist board and the British Tourist Authority. As we do not have as much time as we would have liked, I shall just say that it has made a terrific difference having Adele Biss as chairman of the English tourist board. The managing directors, as it were, are John East and, at the BTA, Anthony Sell. I feel that they are injecting a new sense of dynamism into those organisations. They have been looking at everything. For instance, Anthony Sell has just completed a tour of all of the BTA stations around the world. He is getting the bureaucracy squeezed out of the centre and directing it to the outposts for promoting this country abroad, and I congratulate him on that.

At this stage, I shall pick up on what the hon. Member for Redcar and one or two other hon. Members said about D-day. Of course, the tourism aspect of the D-day memorial was extremely important and the hon. Lady will be pleased to know that it was not only important, but successful. We gave more money to the BTA office in New York, which is now run by its dynamic new chief, Mr. Jeff Hamblin, and he was specifically set the task of getting as many visitors as possible from North America over here to participate in our joint activities to commemorate the 50th anniversary of D-day. According to the initial information from the BTA, its efforts were extremely successful. I cannot give full weight to the figure given, but it is estimated that more than 100,000 extra visitors from North America came over to share in our commemoration of D-day. That is what we wanted to achieve.

We look forward to next year's commemoration of the end of the second world war and we should be grateful to receive any advice about that which hon. Members may wish to give us. I should also pay tribute to Lowe Bell for its efforts in getting those extra tourists over here. It did a marvellous job in raising public awareness of D-day and increased the number of events for tourists from just a couple of hundred to more than a thousand. It was marvellously professional and I congratulate it and thank it for the role that it played.

I am aware, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) said, that the headquarters of the British Resorts Association is in his constituency, because I had the pleasure of meeting its representatives in Aberdeen on Friday. I am extremely impressed with its work. I hope that it will be possible to hold regular meetings with it and other organisations, because one of the problems of being a Minister is that people only come to the Department when they have a problem. One does not know about the genuine, normal background work. It is just the same for us as hon. Members, often we only see

people at our surgeries when they have some terrible problem. I should be glad to fix up regular meetings between the British Resorts Association and myself so that it can update me on how things are going in its part of the industry. That will give me a context within which to make my judgments as to what more should be done to encourage tourism in this country.

I noted what my hon. Friend said about the allowance for day visitors in the standard spending assessment. My Department was extremely keen to pursue that issue and I am grateful to my ministerial colleagues for doing so. That demonstrates how tourism is only just beginning to be taken more seriously than it used to be in Government. It is another example of the benefits of having a Department such as the Department of National Heritage.

My hon. Friend also mentioned DSS hostels and hotels. I should like to pay great tribute to the work done by my hon. Friends the Members for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) and for Blackpool, North. Without their detailed research, it would have been difficult to convince my ministerial colleagues of the seriousness of the problem.

On the question of the European regional development fund, assisted area status and similar funding, it is true that tourism has not always benefited from those funds. The idea still exists that unless a job is in the manufacturing sector it is not a proper job. That is rubbish, because jobs in tourism are as important as those in any other sector. We must be absolutely sure that those who make decisions on how to deploy moneys from the ERDF, assisted area status funds or single regeneration budgets understand the importance of tourism, as well as that of manufacturing industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough made a powerful contribution to the debate. He mentioned the difficulties that he has encountered about the dualling of the A64. I will draw that matter to the attention to my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister was travelling on the A64 over Whitsun, so perhaps he will not need too much persuading. My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough is right to emphasise the great importance of proper communications.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North emphasised the importance of tourism, which is important not just in this country; it is estimated that it will be the largest industry in the world by the year 2000. He also mentioned the vexed question of VAT on hotel accommodation. I know from my travels round the tourist regions of the strength of feeling on that matter. We and the British Tourist Authority take seriously the points that have been raised about VAT on hotel accommodation. The association has, therefore, hired the consultants Touche Ross to look into the matter and make comparisons, because the matter is not as simple as it looks. The French charge 6 per cent. VAT on hotel accommodation while the Danes charge 25 per cent. and we charge 17.5 per cent. While we do not pay VAT on food, other countries do. It is a complex balance to make, but it should and will be made. I look forward to receiving the advice of Touche Ross in due course.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West talked about the sewage outfall walk in his constituency. I take that seriously. Tourism is not just the Tower of London and the Victoria and Albert museum, or even the Lake district or highlands of Scotland. I welcome anything that adds to the variety of this country's tourism product. I, too, noticed the sign on the GLC building. Indeed, a policeman in the House sharply pointed it out to me and said what a disgrace it was. I cannot say that it is a disgrace because I do not know who is responsible for it, but I will find out whether I have a locus to say that it is an unsightly addition to an important listed building.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have no locus to say how the Football Association should deal with the allocation of world cup tickets, so long as it keeps within the law. If members of the FA have not heard the hon. Gentleman's speech, I am sure that he will draw it to their attention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) made some important points. I heard what he said about the Foundation for Sport and the Arts' contribution to table tennis in Basildon and I shall draw it to the attention of the excellent secretary-general of the FSA, Mr. Grattan-Endicott.

A number of hon. Members mentioned listed sporting events. That is one of the most important points which the Select Committee on National Heritage made to me the other day. It is a difficult balance to strike. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Redcar about the cement that keeps society together. I look forward to considering that point when the Select Committee on National Heritage report is placed before me.

With those few words, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon once again for giving us the chance to discuss this important subject.

2.13 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs: With the leave of the House, I shall briefly summarise the debate.

I am grateful for the support that I have received from a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Although the debate was supposed to be on leisure, it has concentrated increasingly on tourism. That is right and good. I have long been an advocate of the House's showing more interest in tourism. That interest has been amply demonstrated by today's debate. I particularly agreed with those hon. Members who said that as the importance of tourism grows, it becomes much more important that we consider its management in terms of protecting the environment—both the countryside and our historic towns and cities. The Department's predecessor commissioned a report on the environment and tourism a few years ago, which I commend to my hon. Friend the Minister.

The debate has touched on problems with cable. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) had no sooner made his speech than he rushed off to Basildon to deal with more of his constituents' problems. I can tell him, however, that help is at hand and efforts will be made to overcome the problem that he described.

In an excellent contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) pointed out that people in the United States watch more television than we do. The answer to that riddle is simple: their football games last three times longer than ours.

I question whether the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) has read the annual report of the Department of National Heritage.

Ms Mowlam *indicated assent.*

Mr. Coombs: When reading that report, as I have, one is amazed by the sheer volume of activity that a mere two Ministers of the Crown, with one spokesman in the House

[Mr. Coombs]

of Lords, are able to get through. I commend my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for the tremendous energy that he and the Secretary of State have shown in the past two years in covering that complex and important subject. There are signs not so much of drift but of tremendous activity in all directions.

I am delighted that so many of my hon. Friends have spoken up on behalf of their constituencies; that is what these debates tend to degenerate into, and they do it so well that it would be a shame to stop them. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for the fact that he concentrated on the arguments that I made in the debate and was very helpful about several issues. However, I commend to him the importance of considering the heritage and the way that private owners within heritage can be helped in the future.

I want England, Britain and the United Kingdom to be successful in sport and in other respects. I want us to win cricket matches. I want us to win football matches. I want us to win athletics gold medals. I want Jeremy Bates to win Wimbledon. I want a great deal. I am hungry for more success for the United Kingdom in sport and other aspects of leisure. I want the British to be an active, healthy and happy nation, and I hope that, in a small way, this debate has helped to make that dream a reality.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Department of National Heritage on its first two years; recognises its contribution to the development of leisure in the United Kingdom; calls for a continuing debate on the purposes for which the proceeds of the National Lottery should be used; and expresses the hope that, in future, encouragement will thereby be given to the promotion of more active leisure pursuits.

Reform of Parliament

2.15 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I beg to move,

That this House notes the declining importance of Parliament in the nation's affairs as power moves from national governments to the institutions of the European Union; and calls for a reduction in the number of honourable Members of Parliament, the construction of a new Parliamentary building, the uninterrupted televising of proceedings, the election of a second chamber by regional proportional representation, the determination of the electoral system for the Commons following a referendum, the provision of adequate chamber facilities for honourable Members, and for pre-legislative scrutiny and reinforcement of the Select Committee system.

I express my gratitude to the business managers for allowing us to reach motion No. 2 so that I can say a few words.

On Monday this week, when the Liberal Democrats had a motion down about changing parliamentary procedures, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) spoke about the public contempt for Parliament. In my opinion, he was absolutely wrong: there is no public contempt for Parliament. If there is contempt—and one would accept that there is—it is contempt for politicians.

Many people would say that politicians rank only slightly above journalists and cockroaches in public esteem. I have always thought that that was a little unkind to cockroaches because they are perfectly evolved creatures, which is more than I can say for many Members of Parliament.They would survive a nuclear holocaust, which, fortunately, no Member of Parliament would.

That shows that our standing in the eyes of the electorate is fairly low. There is a worrying degree of mutual contempt; that is what I sense—mutual contempt. If a Government who were elected on a minority of votes push hard with deeply unpopular legislation without regard for public opinion, the electorate get the feeling that the politicians and—although I shall not particularise—the Government do not give a damn about their feelings. If we continue to ignore the wishes of the electorate, obviously we prove them right in that respect. Mutual contempt is therefore created.

We perhaps feel—when I say, "we", I mean all hon. Members—that we can get away with things that are unpopular. That is a way of treating the electorate with contempt, and the electorate simply think that politicians are self-seeking and do not pay very much attention to the wishes and needs of their constituents. In both cases, that is a slightly unfair analysis, but we all sense those feelings that people have about us.

Recently there has rightly been an upsurge in parliamentary navel-gazing. I mentioned the debate that we had at the beginning of the week. On Monday, we shall debate the Select Committee system. We are still waiting to debate the Jopling report in any meaningful and executive measure, although I suspect and trust that we shall do so shortly. I think that it is right that we should examine this institution very critically.

I am pleased to say that in recent years my party, the Labour party, has proposed, through conference resolutions, a range of constitutional changes that the next Labour Government will implement: a Bill of Rights; a second Chamber elected by regional list and proportional representation; the election of British Members of the European Parliament in a similar way; the restoration of

independent local government; the scrutiny by Parliament of the prerogative powers of the Executive; and fixed-term Parliaments, which I think are very significant indeed.

The Prime Minister of the day has far too much power to decide when the election will be called. Clearly, a Prime Minister will not choose a time that is inconvenient or embarrassing to his party. It is difficult to see the present Prime Minister finding any window of opportunity between now and 1997—I am sure that he will go all the way to the wire. If we had fixed-term Parliaments as other countries do, it would give a degree of certainty. If Governments start manoeuvring and creating economic booms, we cannot stop them, but the electorate will know what it is all about. The Labour party will be considering Lord Plant's report on proportional representation systems. It is right that we should do so.

Changes are coming whether we like it or not, mainly because of the European dimension. Powers are moving away from this place and from all national Parliaments, as they move towards the institutions of the European Union. There are hon. Members in all parties who find that disagreeable. They believe that the disappearance of parliamentary sovereignty and powers into the institutions of Brussels marks a retrograde step. I do not believe that. I shall not go too deeply into the subject, but I believe in a federal Europe. I have no fears about national sovereignty disappearing into the greater good or the nation state moving away and disappearing as states evolve and we move towards a federal European state. That seems to be natural and I welcome it.

We cannot stand around in this place whingeing about the changes and the way that they affect us; we must try to respond to them. The European Parliament will clearly obtain more powers—Maastricht guaranteed that. The intergovernmental conference in 1996 will undoubtedly move the process forward. It is important that we work within those movements and try to ensure that the European Parliament obtains more power so that it can hold the institutions of the European Union to greater account. We need to democratise those institutions. It is no good whingeing; we must respond to the changes.

We have a thin legislative programme and we can already see how we are making work for ourselves in this place to fill up the available time, which is depressing. We are looking at the possibility of the summer recess starting in the middle of next month and continuing until October. If this place is meant to hold the Executive to account, it cannot do so with a 14 or 15-week summer recess. We should consider ways of phasing the recesses throughout the year so that if it is true that we hold the Executive to account in this place—which I doubt—we can make more of a fist of it by questioning Ministers regularly and not letting them off the hook for an enormously long period in the summer.

I think that we all accept that we work ridiculous hours in this place. The hours and the manner of our work destroy individuals' health and personal relationships. I shall not go too deeply into the issue of the hours we work as the Jopling report is considering that subject. I am sure that we shall have an opportunity before the recess to debate that issue, and, more important, to vote on the report's recommendations.

I mentioned the fact that the Labour party will be considering the Plant report. To his eternal credit, John Smith said that the Labour Government would have a referendum on a change of system if one is proposed, which I suspect it will be. I can see how things are working. It would be better for a proposal to change our electoral system to come from one of the major parties—the Labour party or the Conservative party—than for it to come from the Liberal Democrats, who could be seen to be self-seeking in wanting to change the system. I want our electoral system to reflect the needs and wishes of the electorate. I do not think that the way our system works at the moment has that effect.

If we changed to a system of proportional representation, we could reduce the numbers of Members of Parliament. There are far too many of them, although that might be hard to believe looking around the Benches today. There are 651 and their work loads differ enormously. I know that there are Stakhanovites on both sides of the House; the same people always seem to be around. But if the United States, with a population of 240 million, can get away with a Congress of 535, I should have thought that we, with a much smaller population, could get away with far fewer Members of Parliament.

As the Government are reducing their functions these days by privatising everything, perhaps it is time they started to reduce the number of Ministers too. I note that one group never mooted for privatisation are the Government themselves. They might get some support from us if they proposed to privatise themselves.

If we reduced the numbers of Members of Parliament, we could improve the facilities for them. I am not looking for jacuzzis and sun beds, but we could at least have allocated places in this Chamber. The layout of the Chamber derives from the fact that, in 1547, Edward VI gifted his chapel to the Commons—and we are left with this ridiculous choir stall arrangement and no facilities.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I wonder whether my hon. Friend is aware that the hemicycle shape of most European legislatures leads to rhetorical interventions by Ministers and none of the give and take that I have enjoyed in my four or five weeks here.

I have worked for the BBC and for a trade union, both extremely parsimonious institutions; but now I come here to find that there are no facilities and no secretarial help. There are free paper clips and there is free stationery. The meanest pizza delivery boy has a fax and a mobile phone, but we have nothing. I want to do a job for Rotherham, and I should like to have the facilities with which to do it.

Mr. Banks: I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) I hope that he has discovered the Fees Office by now. The best bit of advice one can give a new Member is to tell him the way to the Fees Office. We do get secretarial allowances, so people outside tend not to sympathise with us much. But it is difficult to run a constituency office and a Westminster office, as I do, on the £41,000 that we receive—it is clearly not enough. Last year, and the year before that, I had to give the Fees Office a cheque at the end of the year—last year for £7,000 or £8,000—because I had gone over my budget. I had stopped claiming money, because there was none left by November in a financial year that goes through to March. We do not have enough resources to do our jobs properly.

This is a strange place to work in, because no account is taken of our differing work loads. In my constituency, I get problems by the skip load, yet I have exactly the same facilities as does a Member of Parliament who may receive

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a few dozen letters a week and whose main problem is deciding which garden fete to open on Saturday. Would that I had those sorts of problems!

The answer lies entirely in our own hands. We are in the strange position of being our own bosses—although we seem to have lots of other bosses who are always telling us what to do and what we have done wrong, and how they would do it differently. Every pub contains an alternative Government. It is one of the great tragedies of this life: if only all those taxi drivers and hairdressers would turn to politics, the country might be far better run.

As I say, we could deal with the matter ourselves, but we have consistently failed to do so. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham will add his voice to those arguing, not for luxury for hon. Members, but for decent facilities so that they can do a better constituency job.

I think that the layout of this Chamber should be changed. No great history attaches to it, after all; it only dates from 1951. We could turn it into a hemicycle. If we did not want to do that, we could certainly have allocated desks if, as I have suggested, we reduced the number of hon. Members, and that would enable us to have electronic voting. Why do we have to go through the absurdity of continually breaking off to go into the Division Lobby? I do not want to see all the traditions of this place thrown away, but we must not allow ourselves to be imprisoned by our past.

The Chamber is confrontational. If we took 650 people from the telephone directory and stuck them in this place they would behave in exactly the same way as hon. Members behave at Prime Minister's Question Time. In many respects, the Chamber is like a football pitch with banks of supporters on each side looking down to the pitch, each group cheering on its own side even when it is playing rubbish. That is precisely what it is all about—and unfortunately too many people view Prime Minister's Question Time as the be all and end all of parliamentary activity, which it is not.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Bills

ABOLITION OF SERVICE CHARGES IN RESTAURANTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): No day named.

INSOLVENCY (No. 3) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WATER (DOMESTIC DISCONNECTIONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [25 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 1 July.

WITHDRAWAL OF MEDICAL TREATMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HORSES (PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR FOR YOUNG RIDERS) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 15 July.

FREEDOM TO ROAM (ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

SALE AND SUPPLY OF GOODS BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered, read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

TELEVISION LICENCES (REDUCTION FOR POOR RECEPTION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MARRIAGE BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) at the sitting on Monday 27th June, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 9 (Sittings of the House), the Motion for the Adjournment of the House in the name of the Prime Minister shall lapse at Seven o'clock; and

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Speaker shall—

(a) at the sitting on Tuesday 28th June, put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Ports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 and the draft Ports (Northern Ireland Consequential Provisions) Order 1994 not later than three hours after the first such Motion has been entered upon or half-past Eleven o'clock, whichever is the earlier; and

(b) at the sitting on Thursday 30th June, put the Question on

(i) the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order 1994 not later than one and a half hours after it has been entered upon;

(ii) the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Civil Service (Management Functions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 not later than one and a half hours after it has been entered upon; and

(iii) the Motion in the name of Mrs. Gillian Shephard relating to the draft Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 not later than one and a half hours after it has been entered upon;

and the said Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Gatwick Airport (Second Runway)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Kenneth Baker (Mole Valley): The last time that I moved an Adjournment debate was more than 20 years ago, so no one could claim that I am abusing this parliamentary procedure. Hon. Members should use Adjournment debates to bring to a wider audience a matter that particularly affects their constituents and about which their constituents are concerned. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London is to reply to the debate. He was my Parliamentary Private Secretary for a number of years and we are good friends. *[Interruption.]* He was an excellent PPS, not just very good, and he has been an excellent Minister, one of the Government's most robust defenders on the Front Bench. I wish him well in the forthcoming shuffle. *[Interruption.]* The fact that a Whip is cheering means nothing.

The possibility of a second runway at Gatwick has occasioned more concern in my constituency than any matter that I can recall. I have had thousands of letters on the matter, and that is exceptional for any hon. Member. There have been huge public meetings at which hundreds of people have turned up not only in Surrey but in Sussex. The councils involved, including my own, Mole Valley district council, which is co-ordinating the campaign by district councils against the runway, and Surrey county council, have also strongly opposed it. The Gatwick area conservation campaign, which is being brilliantly led by Brendon Sewell, has co-ordinated much of the local opposition.

The possibility of a second runway derives from the RUCATSE—standing for runway capacity in the south-east—report, which examined airport capacity in the first 20 years of the next century in south-east England and London. For two reasons, I was appalled to find in that report that Gatwick was even considered as a possibility for expansion. First, in 1981, the inspector at the second terminal inquiry at Gatwick said:

"There is no prospect of a second runway at Gatwick and it would plainly be an environmental disaster to create one."

Following that view of the inspector, the Government issued an airports policies White Paper in 1985. I was then Secretary of State for the Environment, so I remember the discussions on it in the Cabinet. In that document, the Government set out their policy. It said:

"The Government believes that the provision of a second runway at Gatwick would have unacceptable environmental implications."

That is Government policy. It has not been changed, it has not been modified, it has not been trimmed, it has not been qualified and it has not been altered in any way. It is still Government policy and I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will reaffirm that this afternoon.

Secondly, I was appalled because there is a legal agreement between the British Airports Authority and Sussex county council, which was entered into when planning permission was given for the second terminal at Gatwick. That agreement precludes starting construction on a runway before 2019. I went to see Sir John Egan, the chairman of the British Airports Authority, and his authority sent me a letter, which said:

"So far as Gatwick is concerned, as you know, BAA has signed an agreement with the Local Authorities under which we have

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agreed not to construct an additional runway at the Airport for 40 years. That agreement runs until 2019, and we consider ourselves bound by it."

That is a very clear, absolutely categorical statement. The British Airports Authority considers that that legal agreement is totally binding. Therefore, if a Government of any complexion decided to go ahead with a second runway, they would have to bring in primary legislation to set aside that legal agreement, which, I must say to the House, would be unthinkable and could not be carried.

I entirely accept that air transport is very important to the British economy, and that we should be very proud of the fact that Heathrow is the largest and busiest international airport in the world. It brings a great deal of wealth and prosperity to our country, although 30 per cent. of the passengers at Heathrow do not come to stay in London but are transiting to other places. It is a major centre of movement and transfer in air travel, and we do not want to lose that.

I also entirely accept that there will be more air travel over the years to come. More people are wanting to travel —there is some doubt about the figures, but that increase is inevitable. How will that be accommodated? Heathrow will certainly have to expand to at least 80 million passengers a year and that is on the cards. Gatwick will have to expand from its present 20 or 21 million passengers to about 30 to 35 million and I have no objection to that. There will be expansion in the existing framework of the airport, a better use of runways and more night flights and I am reluctantly prepared to accept all of that.

At the same time, regional airports will expand. Manchester is an enormous success as an international airport. In the second city in France, Lyon, the airport is tiny and provincial. Manchester is a major international airport with flights going out to all over the world and it is something of which we can be proud. There is shortly to be a second terminal there, as I understand, which will enhance its position. There are other regional airports such as the East Midlands airport, Leeds-Bradford and Newcastle. In fact, since the publication of the RUCATSE report, East Midlands airport has come forward to say that it would like to handle more passengers. All those developments will ease the pressure on the London conurbation as a centre of air travel and that is very important. At the same time, there should be a better use of the existing runways and a greater use of night flights.

What is the proposal to which I am objecting? It is simply that I feel that a second runway should not be built at Gatwick. It would expand the passenger throughput at Gatwick—currently 20 million passengers a year—to 80 million a year. That is a four times increase. Down in Surrey and north Sussex, there would be an airport broadly twice the size of Heathrow. One knows the enormous spread of Heathrow. A great airport such as that involves not only runways but hotels, warehousing, car parking facilities and all the network of commercial activities which take place around it. A quadrupling of size is an enormous change. It would mean a huge industrial and commercial complex, mainly in my constituency, but spreading into the whole of Surrey and Sussex.

RUCATSE said that an airport was needed in the south-east by the year 2010. Now that the figures have been refined, that date looks like extending to 2020 or 2025, which is important in itself. The case against Gatwick is that such an enormous industrial and commercial undertaking would affect an area of considerable environmental beauty.

The whole area covered by the proposal in Surrey and north Sussex is in my backyard. People may say that that is why I am pursuing the matter but if one does not look after one's own back yard, no one else will. Also, the back yard that I am looking after comprises the whole of the southern part of Surrey and the northern part of Sussex —some back, some yard. It is a major and beautiful part of the country. Nearly all of it is green belt, and much of it is occupied by areas of outstanding natural beauty. Some areas contain acres and acres of ancient woodlands that date back to the middle ages, which would have to be destroyed—a proposal to which the Woodland Trust is objecting.

The proposed development would also destroy the villages of Charlwood and Hookwood. Charlwood is a particularly beautiful mediaeval village. It has a real sense of community with a village school, shops, two or three pubs and a cricket team. It is a recognisable living community with a great community feel. That would go. How can one live between two runways when one cannot get to the village?

Hookwood would also go. Charlwood and Hookwood have 55 listed buildings, one of which is a Norman church having the oldest wall painting—it dates from the 13th century—in the country. It is older than any English picture in the national gallery. It would cease to be the active, vibrant church that it is today, and would become an empty, derelict stump. The other villages under the flight path that would go would be Newdigate, Oakwood Hill, Capel and Beare Green. Life would be unbearable in them all.

When one reads the list of villages that would be affected, it is rather like the herald describing the casualties to Henry V after Agincourt—Charlwood, Hookwood, Newdigate, Ockley, Oakwood Hill, Capel and Beare Green. The list has a ring of destruction and despair, and the destruction of those villages must not happen.

The other environmental argument is that an airport capable of transporting 80 million passengers a year will generate an enormous volume of road traffic. RUCATSE acknowledges that new roads would have to be built. The main existing road is the M23, which feeds in to the M25 and continues to Brighton. It is currently a three-lane, four-lane motorway—but would have to become a 14-lane motorway. The M25 is currently a three-lane motorway going to a four-lane motorway—eight lanes in width. The level of traffic generated by a huge industrial and commercial complex would require much wider motorways.

If any Government were to approve a second runway at Gatwick, the M25 would have to be widened to 14 lanes around its entire perimeter. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, that move would be strongly opposed by all the relevant councils and by Members of Parliament whose constituencies would be affected. An airport twice as large as Heathrow in the south of England would attract passengers from the midlands and the north. They would have to make long journeys there. Some would fly down, while others would take trains or travel by car. A great volume of traffic movement would result, which is a powerful argument against a second runway at Gatwick.

It does not end there. If the M23 were widened to 14 lanes to end at Coulsdon near its junction with the M25, it

is impossible to think that that would be satisfactory for traffic from central London. It takes about an hour to travel from central London to the M25 at Coulsdon, and trying to avoid Croydon makes it a miserable journey through a series of suburban roads. Given the amount of traffic that a huge airport would generate, it is unthinkable that the development would be possible without a motorway such as the M4—which goes out to Heathrow—starting much closer to the centre of London.

There is another environmental snag. The development would not take place in a beautiful flat area; there is a hill in the way, called Stan Hill. For flying to be made safe, a cutting nine times the size of the cutting at Twyford Down would need to be driven through the hill—and it is doubtful whether flying would be safe even then. My hon. Friend the Minister knows all about Twyford Down: he bears some of the scars. This particular environmental scar would be unacceptable.

For all those environmental reasons, a second runway at Gatwick is a very bad idea. Help is at hand, however. Unusually, it comes from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who has issued regional planning guidance for the south-east of England. In his guidance to inspectors on the sort of planning needed in the south-east, issued about two months ago, he states explicitly that any major economic development should take place in the north and east of London rather than the south and west, which constitute the most congested part of the country. According to the guidance,

"In the western counties of the South East"—

Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and south Buckinghamshire—

"while having regard to the needs of the market, and taking account of the changes to the structure of the local economy since the late 1980s"—

this is the key phrase—

"a reducing rate of economic and housing development is appropriate."

A sentence or two later, the Secretary of State says:

"At Crawley/Gatwick, despite infrastructure, and services improvements to cope with recent rapid growth, constraints on development, and policy constraints in adjoining areas, make regionally significant expansion undesirable."

That is the clearest and most explicit statement of Government policy for the relevant part of the south-east of England. Unless the Government tear up that guidance and forget it, it is unthinkable that they could possibly consider a runway at Gatwick, given the phrase

"policy constraints in adjoining areas, make regionally significant expansion undesirable."

I would go further: on environmental and aviation grounds, Gatwick is the least attractive of the three main options.

What, then, should the Government do? They can be helpful. I am sure that they want to be helpful for all sorts of reasons—not just to me, but to a wider body of opinion in the south-east. First, they should accept that building another runway in the south-east is politically and environmentally unacceptable until Stansted and Luton airports are full. Stansted carries just 2 million passengers, although it can take 20 million; it should be full before any consideration takes place. Luton—a much smaller airport than Stansted, but much more reliably managed—carries about 3 million passengers; it, too, could take more. A determined effort must be made to expand the airports before another runway is considered.

Secondly, the Government should accept that there is no need for a runway before the 2025. Thirdly, they should develop the regional airports more vigorously. Fourthly, they should reaffirm their Gatwick legal agreement. Fifthly —this is not really my hon. Friend's responsibility, but I hope that he will consider it—the Government should announce more generous compensation terms when a site is chosen. Many of my constituents now have difficulty in selling their houses, because they are suffering from blight. When my hon. Friends consider the various representations on the different sites, I hope that they will rapidly come to the conclusion that it is not sensible and would be highly damaging and disastrous to have a second runway at Gatwick.

2.49 pm

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): It is with great pleasure that I intervene in support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). I do so to make it clear that he speaks not merely for his constituents, whose communities will be torn apart by a second runway at Gatwick, but for hundreds of thousands of people living for miles around.

My constituents in Horley will be close to the eastern end of the runway. They share with the inhabitants of large swathes of Surrey and Sussex a feeling of utter horror that such devastation should even be contemplated. It is an area of beautiful countryside. It is part of the green belt—the very lungs by which those in the Greater London conurbation can breathe. That it should be punctured to produce an airport twice the size of the present one, requiring 27,000 new homes to be built, ancillary service buildings and a vast programme of additional road building, is unthinkable.

The need for a second runway in the south-east within the proposed time scale is based on analyses and assumptions which are open to grave doubt. It is highly likely that such additional capacity will not be required until much later in the next century, which gives the Government plenty of time to investigate, for example, the Thames estuary option, which will cause far less damage to established communities, but which RUCATSE, to its shame, barely touched on.

I give my hon. Friend the Minister some friendly political advice. Today's debate, useful though it is, is but an initial skirmish. I warn him that unless he or his successors make it clear soon that they are dropping the suggestion, they will not know what has hit them when many Conservative Members make their feelings known. Now that the consultation period has closed, I urge him and the Secretary of State to lift the cloud of fear hanging over many established communities and to make it clear that they have no intention of raping and destroying our environment.

2.51 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): It is a great pleasure for me to have the honour of responding to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). It was a tremendous honour to have served as his Parliamentary Private Secretary. I fear that he gives me far more credit than I deserve. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley, the Whip on duty, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) and I share one distinction: all three of us have seconded the Loyal Address. What unites my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling and myself is that neither of us has achieved the august stature required to be allowed to propose the Loyal Address, which my right hon. Friend has.

[Mr. Steve Norris]

Commendably, my right hon. Friend has avoided Adjournment debates for 20 years, but I remind him that the idea is that we share the time. I fear that I have about seven or eight minutes in which to respond to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner). I hope that he will forgive me if, to some extent, I merely acknowledge the various points that have been made.

I understand why my right hon. Friend should have raised this subject and I accept the observation of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate that feelings on the subject in Sussex run high. The simple truth that we all suffer from an extraordinary form of schizophrenia when we contemplate airport development underlies the issue. I register my own interest in that my constituency is not a million miles from Stansted airport, one of the three main airports serving London. We all want to see the economy expand and jobs to be created. I recall offhand that Heathrow gives employment to about 50,000 people, quite apart from the jobs created by the business that the airport generates.

Gatwick, of course, is already a hugely important hub and a hugely important employer. It is the fifth largest airport in Europe, competing with Charles de Gaulle and Schiphol in its own right. As my right hon. Friend said, it already handles more than 20 million passengers, which gives it a considerable position in the league.My right hon. Friend was generous enough to confirm, as most people would, that development of the existing facilities for perhaps up to 30 million passengers a year and beyond is entirely to be hoped for.

It is natural that whenever we contemplate the hugely difficult proposition of where we put a new runway, we should run into the concerns that have been so ably expressed this afternoon. I shall not attempt to debate for a second the relative merits of the various sites that the working group on runway capacity for the south-east—RUCATSE—discussed; that would not be appropriate. I merely say that when my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate mentions Marinair—the estuarial airport option—I conclude only that perhaps some of the enthusiasm for that option derives from the simple fact that it is in no one's back yard. Although I say no more on that, it does not make the discussion of issues such as this one any easier.

It was right for the Government to follow up the advice from the Civil Aviation Authority on the need for runways and to set in hand the RUCATSE work. At that time, the Government acknowledged what was said in the 1985 White Paper, which my right hon. Friend quoted—that second runways should not be built at either Gatwick or Stansted. In its terms of reference, RUCATSE was explicitly asked to have regard to the environmental considerations which led to those views and they are, indeed, as my right hon. Friend stated.

I confirm straight away that I am, of course, aware of the legal agreement between the British Airports Authority and West Sussex county council to the effect that a second runway should not be built before 2019. The extent to which local people have set great store by that agreement has been brought forcefully to my attention by my right hon. Friend, not only today but in correspondence, and I acknowledge the importance of that agreement. In summary, RUCATSE produced forecasts of traffic and asked how those could be accommodated at the various sites.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My hon. Friend says that he acknowledges the importance of the agreement. Do I take it from that that the Government do not have it in mind to set aside the agreement, but that they will honour it and accept it?

Mr. Norris: As my right hon. Friend knows, the agreement is between the local authority and the airport owners—between West Sussex county council and the BAA. As such, it is not an agreement to which the Government are specifically party and, therefore, it is not for me to contemplate its being set aside. The important thing—this is a specific reassurance that my right hon. Friend rightly wants—is that the Government fully recognise the importance of that perfectly legally binding agreement. My right hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Secretary of State for the Environment, will understand that, in these circumstances, that is as far as I can go.

RUCATSE was asked, first, to produce forecasts of traffic and, secondly, to see how they could be accommodated at the various sites by, for example, looking at possible layouts of runways and terminals. Thirdly, it was asked to assess the implications in respect of a variety of criteria. It is terribly important to stress that the alignments studied by RUCATSE were indicative only. Although some of the features of the analysis would be robust in terms of small or even large changes, others would not. The group attempted as far as possible to address key questions resulting from changes in assumptions through the use of a variety of sensitivity tests.

The forecasts that RUCATSE produced were performed on an objective basis for all the sites that were studied. Naturally, forecasting of this sort is very much long-term stuff and very inexact. We all accept that. We have assumed reasonable economic growth and we have acknowledged that its translation into a rapid rate of air traffic growth—more than 6 per cent. on average in the 1970s and 1980s—is unlikely to continue. The judgment was made that there would be lower growth rates and a maturing of the most developed markets, but that there would eventually be a need for extra capacity.

My right hon. Friend was right about the increasing importance of regional airports. We recognise that, but we cannot put the matter to one side and convince ourselves that a combination of peripheral developments, however relevant, will provide a total solution to the need for this country to be competitive well into the 21st century. Air transport will be an important part of that and RUCATSE's work, unenviable in many ways, but supported—I acknowledge this—by many local environmental groups around each of the airports, has been invaluable.

I give my right hon. and hon. Friends an assurance that we are not dealing here with a specific application. If there were any development attempted to take forward the notion of Gatwick as the location for an additional runway, there would not only be the need for a full and detailed environmental impact assessment, but a great deal more of an extremely long and convoluted process in which I would expect my right hon. and hon. Friends to play a full part.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 27 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Industrial Economy

1. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the state of the industrial economy in Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): The Welsh industrial economy is doing extremely well. Between 1990 and the end of 1993, manufacturing output in Wales increased by 5.3 per cent. compared with a reduction of 4.3 per cent. in the United Kingdom as a whole. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that, and its consequences for his constituency.

Mr. Jones: But there is no room for complacency, with tens of thousands of Welsh people unemployed—3,000 of them my constituents. Will the Minister therefore argue strongly in Cabinet, to help the aerospace workers, for the purchase of the future large aircraft? Will he also, in Cabinet, consider how British Airways may be persuaded to buy the Airbus? He might even consider talking to Mrs. Redwood, secretary to the board.

Mr. Redwood: Of course I will do all in my legitimate power to further the interests of the workers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and in the aircraft manufacturing industry; but he, with the rest of the House, might like to welcome the fact that unemployment has fallen by 6.9 per cent. in his constituency in the past year. Furthermore, unemployment in the travel-to-work area is now 7.9 per cent., which is well below the Welsh, United Kingdom and EC averages.

Mr. Roger Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that growing numbers of engineering apprentices are a classic sign of an improving industrial economy? Can he tell us the good news on that aspect as well?

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is announcing today that 550 young people will benefit from the new training package for engineering apprentices in the current year, entailing expenditure of £3.6 million on them and on the necessary related activities. We want a stronger engineering industry in Wales; this is a positive way of achieving it.

Mr. Denzil Davies: If the Welsh economy is doing so well, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why average incomes per head in Wales are now the lowest not just in Britain but in the United Kingdom? In other words, we are now poorer than Northern Ireland. If the economy is doing so well, why are the figures so bad?

Mr. Redwood: Why does not the right hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that manual manufacturing earnings in Wales are in line with those in the rest of the United Kingdom? Why does not he welcome the 10,000-plus additional full-time manufacturing jobs? Why does not he welcome the other initiatives that we are taking to improve the situation in Wales?

For us, it is "better made in Wales". For the Opposition, it is "better moan in Wales".

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Welsh Development Agency still plays a key role in the development of the Welsh industrial sector? If that is so, will he explain how jobs will be created in Gwynedd at a time when the WDA is taking dozens of jobs away from Gwynedd and when the commitment to decentralising from Cardiff to north Wales appears to be being reneged on? Will the right hon. Gentleman give a commitment to the effect not only that the WDA will have a central role and the resources to do its job on an all-Wales level, but that that will apply particularly to Gwynedd?

Mr. Redwood: Of course I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Gwynedd will benefit from the WDA's programmes in the same way as other parts of Wales that are eligible for assistance do. He knows full well that I have set out to the House guidance to the WDA making it clear that, in areas such as land reclamation and winning new investment for Wales, it has a most important job to do.

Mr. Ron Davies: Since the Secretary of State has mentioned the importance of training, will he acknowledge the work done by the WDA's Gateway Euro project, which is based at Treforest and acknowledged by the European Commission as a centre of training excellence which is vital to equipping Welsh industry with the skills needed to compete in the new European marketplace? If he does realise the value of that institution, why is he closing it? Is this another example of the Secretary of State, just like the Prime Minister at Corfu, putting Conservative party ideology and self-interest before the interests of the people whom he is supposed to represent?

Mr. Redwood: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman is trying to be even more aggressive than usual today—it could be his last occasion on the Front Bench at Welsh questions. Of course, I want high-quality training in Wales and I have already made an important announcement this afternoon about how we are progressing with that aim. There are a number of ways of achieving that, but the best is through Government programmes and the training and enterprise councils, which we are supporting and expanding.

Local Government

2. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the extent of proposals by local authorities in Wales to provide two-tier services.

Mr. Redwood: I was disturbed to read in the *South Wales Echo* that South Glamorgan is operating a policy of

providing highways services, especially repair and maintenance, based not just on highways criteria but on certain social criteria. I hope that, as a consequence, there will not be a two-tier service and that that council will recognise its safety obligations to all the electors in its area.

Mr. Richards: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not only disgraceful but unlawful for South Glamorgan county council to discriminate against Conservative-controlled areas in the provision of services, as Mr. Russell Goodway, the leader of the council, has said it is his authority's intention so to do?

Mr. Redwood: It would indeed be illegal to discriminate in the way that my hon. Friend suggests. I note from the report in the *South Wales Echo* that the council is following a policy that uses criteria in addition to highways criteria. The council must be very careful to ensure that its safety and statutory obligations are fully met.

Mr. Rogers: The right hon. Gentleman's proposals for the reorganisation of local government will create unitary authorities, but already those authorities have come together to create a second, two-tier system of local government in south Wales. An important element that has been incorporated into that is industrial development.

In considering the powers that might go to those local authorities, will the right hon. Gentleman make a little more effort on behalf of his Government? They have been in power for 15 years and have effectively destroyed the economy of the south Wales valleys. That is manifest in a survey published today which shows that, unfortunately, my constituency has the lowest incomes of any part of the United Kingdom. The valley communities of south Wales earn only about 64 per cent. of the national average wage. Is not that an absolute disgrace and will the right hon. Gentleman now admit that his policies and those of his predecessors—the so-called valleys initiatives—have fallen into disrepute and must be replaced?

Mr. Redwood: Of course not. The valleys initiatives have achieved a great deal. I fully accept that much more needs to be done and that is what I and my colleagues are working to achieve. I hope that Labour Members will offer some support. They would be shocked if I announced the withdrawal of the valleys programme, but I hasten to reassure them that I have no intention of doing so. It is a fine programme which can offer a great deal.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about local government, unitary authorities will offer good-quality services where the right councils are elected. It is the right framework for them. I just wish that Labour would stop messing about with its policy on regional assemblies, especially as the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is in considerable difficulty over whether he wants one immediately. But then we know that there is much less to the hon. Gentleman than meets the eye.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Have not the Government inflicted two-tier services on local authorities, especially in community care? I remind the Minister of Welsh Office circular 30/94, which specifically says that community care should not be given to individuals if it is too expensive.

Mr. Redwood: A large amount of additional money has rightly been put into that policy. Hon. Members on both sides of the House want the most frail and disabled members of our community to get decent care. We backing local government and giving it the neces money and I want to see high-quality services for al need.

Railways

3. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of S for Wales when he last met Railtrack managers to disc improvements to the main railway lines in north and so Wales.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir W Roberts): My right hon. Friend and I have not yet had opportunity to meet Railtrack, but we hope to meet chairman shortly.

Mr. Jones: The Minister is aware that we are await a report later in the year on a major European study on potential for freight traffic along a number of rou including the north and south Wales main lines. Is the ri hon. Gentleman aware that, even before the completion that report, Railtrack is actively considering investment the track, especially in north Wales, so that it can impro the efficiency and maximum use of trains on both Regio Railways and InterCity? Will the Welsh Office now giv commitment to back that investment by Railtrack, improve not only our economic performance in north-w Wales but our environment?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is right, an am glad that he acknowledges that investment is a mat for Railtrack, which has received the MDS Transmo report on electrification of the north Wales line. I ha received assurances from my right hon. Friend t Secretary of State for Transport that Railtrack will contin to maintain the north Wales line to a fully functio standard. Of course, we shall assist Railtrack when it p investment proposals before us.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my right hon. Friend agr that there have been improvements to main line services the Principality in recent years, particularly in respect journey times between London, Chester, Llandudno a Holyhead? Does he further agree that the greate improvement that we could see this week would be t early resumption of talks in the present rail dispute?

Sir Wyn Roberts: My hon. Friend is probably awa that the dispute is before ACAS. I am sure that he, like m wishes those negotiations to proceed and that the strik that have damaged travellers and rail staff should cea

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Minister ask Railtrack chairman to restore main line status to the Shrewsbury Aberystwyth line, and tell him that it is total unsatisfactory to build a brand-new station such Welshpool with no communications system, no telephon no information provision, an out-of-date timetable and n even a lavatory for people who are waiting for late train Is the Minister aware that once a train has left Shrewsbur Railtrack is unable to identify its location until it reach Machynlleth?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have learned to accept the hon. a learned Gentleman's statements in a somewhat quizzic spirit. The running of the railways is a matter for Briti Rail, Railtrack and the north-west train operating unit.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that there would be much more investment in the railways if Railtrack had not spent £7 million on new offices in the City of London and millions of pounds trying to persuade a sceptical public of the so-called benefits of privatisation, and if it had settled the rail dispute earlier, instead of provoking and prolonging it because of constant interference?

Sir Wyn Roberts: On the latter point, the hon. Gentleman knows that the dispute's settlement and the current negotiations are very much a matter for Railtrack. Investment in Welsh railways is also a matter for Railtrack, but of course my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will discuss those matters when we meet Railtrack's chairman.

Welsh Language

4. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the bodies outlined in the Welsh Language Act 1993 have submitted schemes to promote the Welsh language to the Welsh Language Board.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None. The Welsh Language Board will begin serving notices on those public bodies required to prepare Welsh language schemes after Parliament has approved the guidelines that the board is required to prepare under section 10 of the Welsh Language Act 1993. The guidelines are currently being drafted by the board.

Mr. Hughes: Does not the fact that, although the Act has been on the statute book for a year, there are no guidelines as yet and nobody has come up with schemes for advancing the Welsh language prove that all that was said from these Benches and others last year was true—that the 1993 Act was a lot of English words which did little for the Welsh language? When will the Government do something that delivers the goods?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is critical of our parliamentary procedures and legislation. The 1993 Act lays down precisely what must be done. We established the Welsh Language Board under that Act: it has been appointing staff, is consulting, is in charge of £581,000 worth of grants and is preparing guidelines. Frankly, it is not an easy task to bring to the House guidelines that will secure the full approval of Parliament.

Development Grants

5. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the Welsh Office received legal advice concerning the payment of grants from the Welsh Development Agency to the Development Board for Rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Department received appropriate legal advice in 1982 and decided that the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975 and the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976 provided an acceptable statutory base for the payment of grant.

Mr. Jones: Will the Secretary of State tell us why, over the past 12 years, the Welsh Office has found no opportunity to inform the WDA of the basis of its legal opinion, or to clarify the difference between the two legal opinions taken by the agency? Will he now apologise to the BBC journalists who brought the matter to his attention? He should be very thankful that they did so.

Mr. Redwood: That is a bit rich, coming from the hon. Gentleman. The BBC's allegation that a member of my staff had said that the issue was technically flawed was simply untrue: no member of my staff said any such thing, and it is not the Welsh Office view. A number of other serious allegations were made in the programme, which suggested that my predecessors had deliberately broken the law to further political ends. That, too, is quite untrue.

The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the legal issues surrounding the 1982 policy are very similar to those surrounding the February 1979 policy allowing the issue of loans to companies. That question was settled by officials and Ministers in the Labour Administration. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that those actions were illegal, as he has suggested that ours were?

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in mid-Wales there is a strong feeling that the amount of grant aid made available to that region in the past 12 years is inadequate, when contrasted with the billions of pounds that have been poured into Opposition Members' constituencies? Has my right hon. Friend ever received any complaints from Opposition Members about any specific grant? Does not their conduct, and that of the BBC, provide a clear example of the bitter pill that people in mid-Wales would have to swallow if there were ever another Labour Government?

Mr. Redwood: I certainly do not recall being advised by the Labour party that we should not make the payments. I do not recall Labour Members querying any of them, or suggesting that they were not doing good. My hon. Friend has made his point extremely successfully; he is also right to infer that when Labour passed the legislation for both the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales, it had in mind wide-ranging activities to assist industry and commerce in both parts of Wales.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Secretary of State finally come clean and tell us the basis of that legal advice? Perhaps at the same time he will make clear when the formalities were explained to the House. He will know that in June 1982 the Minister of State said that the formalities would be announced later. Even by the Minister's "Lightning Gonzales" standards, to leave the matter until 1994 and give the House no further explanation is to take a somewhat lackadaisical attitude to the legalities of parliamentary accountability for public money.

Mr. Redwood: We have made the basis clear. It is in section 3 of the 1975 Act, which deals with the general powers of the agency, and I made it clear in my statement that legal advice was taken at the time. We have never denied that some members of the WDA took a different view at the time; I understand that that was discussed with Welsh Office officials in 1982. I am also told by my officials, who have looked very carefully at the files, that the counsel's opinion that the agency then took had not been passed across to the Department. I have now asked for that opinion, and am studying it.

Local Government Reorganisation

6. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations in favour of his proposals to remove Ewenny, Saint Bride's Major and Wick from Bridgend into the Vale of Glamorgan he has received from people or organisations with these communities; and how many he has received against.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): Since the publication of the White Paper, five in favour and 185 against.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Minister refer to my question again? I believe that the five representations in favour were all from organisations outside those three communities. May I inform him of the deep bitterness felt by all voters —especially Conservative supporters, members and elected councillors—about the way in which the Welsh Office has completely ignored the weight of opinion resulting from the consultative process, and the way in which it has slapped democracy in the face?

Mr. Jones: No. I gave the answer strictly in terms of the hon. Gentleman's question. If I had wanted to expand it, I could have said that the number in favour had increased almost threefold, taking into account those outside the three communities, who recognise the affinities in the three communities and want them to be part of the wider Vale of Glamorgan. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is only going through the motions. If he had wanted to do more than that, he would have pressed his amendment on the subject to a vote on 15 June.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in 11 of the past 12 years, electors in the Vale of Glamorgan have enjoyed lower local government taxation than their counterparts in Ogwr and that there is widespread support in the Vale for the Government's proposals? Will my hon. Friend join me in urging the hon. Member for Bridgend to acknowledge that the Local Government (Wales) Bill has completed its passage through the House of Commons and that it is high time that he adopted a positive attitude by urging the merits of the Bill on those of his constituents who will benefit from moving into the Vale of Glamorgan?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend makes his points very well. Vale of Glamorgan borough council has a record of providing better services at lower cost. We have approached the question on the basis of where the areas would be more appropriate. They are more rural in character and they will have a far better future in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Housing Conditions Survey

7. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the next housing conditions survey for Wales will be published.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It will be published in the autumn.

Mr. Smith: Will the Minister explain how local authorities can invest in housing if the data that they use are nine years old?

Mr. Jones: That justifies our wisdom in deciding to carry out an interim housing survey. We wanted to update the figures for all of Wales. That is being done, and when we have finished refining the process, consideration of housing investment will be far better informed.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the Minister aware that at every Saturday surgery hon. Members are hearing heartbreaking cases of people having to wait for up to two years or more for home improvement and renovation grants? At the same time, hundreds of building workers are out of work in our constituencies. Would not it be a good idea to match the two, to the benefit of both, by making new investment in housing improvement and renovation?

Mr. Jones: That confirms, again, the desirability of our policy of seeking to make home renovation grants as widely available as possible and as closely targeted on need. Another £149 million is being provided this year, which should produce almost 10,000 improved homes.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the Minister consider in particular the problems of Dinefwr borough council, whose recently commissioned survey showed that things are much worse now than they were in 1986? The number of unfit homes has risen from 1,938 to 2,463 and one house in six has been designated as unfit. Meanwhile, there is a five-year waiting list for mandatory grants.

Mr. Jones: Yes, we will continue to consider the problems of Dinefwr and, of course, of all other councils in Wales. Since the present grant regime was introduced in 1990, we have made available £850 million, which is a major contribution towards achieving our policy objective of improving homes in Wales.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Minister accept that housing policy must be made in Wales to meet Welsh needs? Does he accept that there would be no justification for shifting emphasis in the Tai Cymru budget from houses for rent to various forms of assisted ownership, which is happening under the Housing Corporation in England? If the Government propose to make such a shift, will he ensure that it is announced to the House in good time so that it can be strongly opposed?

Mr. Jones: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman's attitude, since all surveys of Welsh people have clearly shown that ownership of their own homes commands a high place in their ambitions. We should be seeking to respond to that, and we are doing so.

Mr. Richards: Does my hon. Friend agree with Cynon Valley borough council, which is run by the Labour party, which has said that the problem of homelessness does not exist in its borough?

Mr. Jones: I am truly amazed by this claim by a valley local authority, albeit a Labour one. I am glad to say that it is not the Labour party which is in control of housing policy in Wales. We are providing substantial sums. Despite such obtuse attitudes, we shall carry on doing that.

National Health Service Trusts

8. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Welsh NHS trust chairmen's group to discuss relations between the Welsh Office and the NHS trusts.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend will be meeting NHS trust chairmen on 11 July when a number of topics will be discussed.

Mr. Ainger: Will the Minister take the opportunity when he meets Mr. Derek Morgan, the chairman of the group of chairmen of NHS trusts in Wales, to apologise to him and to the other trust chairmen for the total inadequacy of this year's financial settlement and for the lateness of the announcement, which came only two weeks before the beginning of this financial year? Will he also take the opportunity to explain to Mr. Morgan and his colleagues why the percentage cash rise in England is twice that in Wales and why the announcement was made to the English trusts two months before it was made to the Welsh ones?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman made much the same point during the Welsh Grand Committee debate on 15 June. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State increased the moneys available to the hospital and community health service in Wales by 4.3 per cent., and announced that in December. A similar announcement was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health with regard to the regions in England. There is no need whatever to apologise for that increase, which has resulted in more than one third more in-patients and out-patients being treated in Wales last year than were treated in 1979. That is our record and we are proud of it.

Mr. Hain: When the Minister responds to the proposals put by the local health authorities in West Glamorgan on the future of the east unit of the West Glamorgan trust, will he listen to local opinion about the future of Neath and Port Talbot hospital? Will he ensure that it has proper accident and emergency facilities and that its maternity facilities are fully fledged, and not the midwife unit that the Secretary of State has proposed? People locally regard their hospital in Neath as a precious resource. They do not want to see it downgraded when the new hospital is eventually built on Baglan moor.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We will of course carefully consider all the representations made to us about that particular hospital, just as we always listen to representations made about new hospitals, of which we have set up quite a number in Wales. Again, that is a record of which we can be proud.

Mr. Roger Evans: Can my right hon. Friend assist the House? To what extent are NHS trusts in Wales meeting the targets being set for them?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that, as well as increasing activity to record levels, the trusts in Wales have met all their targets for this year.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Minister just referred to the Neath and Port Talbot district general hospital. He will be aware that that hospital was closed on 90 separate occasions last year because of a shortage of beds. Yet the Government propose to reduce the number of beds available in that catchment area by 200. That is typical of what is happening in planning, so when the Minister meets the chairmen—the original question refers to that meeting—will he apologise for the chaos that has been caused for those who are trying to plan the national health service in Wales?

The Minister's own research, the Welsh health planning forum's study, which was published last week, flatly contradicts the pronouncements by the Secretary of State for Health. She maintains that hospital beds can be reduced by 40 to 60 per cent. The Minister's research suggests that the minimum figure of 40 per cent. would "permanently damage" health provision. Will he now give us a clear answer? Which figure should Welsh health planners use, his figure or her figure?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman should know that there has been an increase in throughput at hospitals and in the use of beds simply because of the advances in medical science and treatment. There will be further advances, of that I have no doubt. I can give the hon. Gentleman this certain assurance—there will be sufficient beds in Wales to deal with accidents, emergencies and such requirements as patients have, and no patient will be forced into day treatment.

Electronics Companies

9. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the management of electronics companies based in Wales to discuss inward investment.

Mr. Redwood: I have met many electronics companies over the past year, including Sony, Assat, Aiwa, Pilkington Electronics and Panasonic. I shall see companies over the summer to discuss inward investment, including another visit to Sony.

Mr. Fabricant: Is not it the case that, despite the Opposition's love affair with the social chapter and the on-costs that that would bring about, and despite the Opposition's love affair with the idea of stripping away our democratisation of the trade unions, we have seen a huge amount of inward investment in that region and that, as a result, we have a large pool of electronics expertise in south Wales, which is possibly unique in Europe? What is my right hon. Friend doing to promote that?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that Opposition Members support policies that would damage Wales and her competitiveness. We are proud of the fact that Wales is now largely strike free. *[Interruption.]* We are proud of the good value that it offers to investors. We are proud of the skills and the talents of the Welsh work force. All Opposition Members can do is jeer at my hon. Friend's great tie because they can think of nothing better on which to comment.

Community And Town Councils

10. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received over the last six months on the future role of community and town councils in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Nine since the publication of the Bill.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister will know that, during the passage of the Local Government (Wales) Bill, I tabled an amendment to the effect that town and community councils should be better consulted in the role of planning. I have now received almost 300 letters in support of that amendment from various councils in Wales. The Minister said at one stage that the purport of the amendment would be included in guidelines soon to be issued to the new

unitary authorities. When will those guidelines be in place and will they contain, as he has already said, the proposals in the amendment?

Mr. Jones: We are working on those guidelines. They are important, and they need to be in response to the exact concerns that the hon. Gentleman has expressed. I cannot give him a precise date at this point. They will be brought forward as early as possible and, yes, I am looking forward to their fully covering the important subjects that we have discussed.

Patients (Statistics)

11. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many (a) in-patients and (b) out-patients were treated in NHS hospitals in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what the figures were in 1979.

Mr. Redwood: In the year to 30 June 1993, NHS Wales treated 480,000 in-patients and 580,000 new out-patients, compared to 350,000 and 429,000 respectively in 1979. That represents increases of 37 per cent. and 36 per cent.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures show, above all else, the improvement in the health service during the past 15 years? What is the scale of the improvement since the health service reforms were introduced?

Mr. Redwood: There has been an acceleration in the pace of improvement in treating patients in the past couple of years, which I welcome. It has been related to more day-care surgery, as well as to improved efficiency in all parts of hospital and health management. My hon. Friend is quite right to say that there has been a massive expansion of health facilities and health care over the past 15 years in Wales. It is high time that Opposition Members, as well as the public, welcomed that.

Local Government Finance

12. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet representatives of Clwyd county council to discuss the effects of the current rate support grant settlement on educational services in the county.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans to do so. Clwyd received the highest increase in standard spending assessment of any Welsh county council in 1994-95. It is for individual local authorities to decide their spending priorities.

Mr. Hanson: Is the Minister aware that some 200 teaching jobs are still being lost this year in Clwyd county council and that much of my postbag is related to the loss of teachers and the lowering of educational standards in the county? It is not good enough to say that we have received a higher level of grant when the Minister knows that the grant has been cut by £6 million this year overall, that much of that grant is ring fenced and that Clwyd has had to make deep cuts. Will he now review the capping criteria, meet the council to review how the grant is set and ensure that there is an improvement in the situation?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman stops ranting at me and starts hectoring his own Labour council, because Clwyd has managed a real-terms cut this year, when Welsh local education authorities as a whole have managed an increase. It grieves me, as it should grieve the hon. Gentleman, that his Labour friends on the council are acting out of political pique—it seems—against school children.

European Union

14. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to strengthen links between Wales and the European Union.

Mr. Redwood: Links have recently been strengthened by Wales's achievement of one extra Member of the European Parliament—although we trust that that Member will give proper representation to the interests of Wales—and, of course, by the development of the Committee of the Regions. The main way in which Wales is looked after is through strong representation in the Council of Ministers similar to the strength of representation that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister showed at the recent summit.

Mr. Flynn: I thank the Secretary of State for Wales for campaigning in the European and local elections in my constituency and congratulate him on his campaign. It helped us to achieve the best results that the Labour party has had this century. Can he tell us why one vote in 12 is a veto in the European Council, but when 86 per cent. of the votes in Wales are against the Government, we still have no voice to stop Tory legislation in Wales?

Mr. Redwood: In order to modify Conservative legislation, Opposition Members need to get a majority in this House of Commons. I look forward to the match in the next general election, when I am sure that we shall reaffirm our majority for the United Kingdom as a whole.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Racial Hatred Prosecutions

20. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions there have been for incitement to racial hatred in each year since 1979; and how many cases were referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions each year.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Since 1979, 79 defendants have been prosecuted for offences concerning incitement to racial hatred. I am placing a breakdown by year in the Library. Records of cases by reference to possible offences are not maintained.

Mr. Gapes: In view of the serious increase in the anti-Semitic and racist material being circulated in Britain and the increase in material being put out by neo-Nazi groups and an extremist group called Hizb ut Tahrir, which has been operating in my constituency, is not it about time that serious consideration was given to taking up the views of the Home Affairs Select Committee about strengthening and enforcing the law against all those who incite racial hatred?

The Attorney-General: I entirely understand and share the hon. Gentleman's concern. I have had constructive meetings recently with the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the all-party committee on race and community, both of which centred on the aspects to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I have to make it clear, and it is worth

the whole country bearing it in mind, that the groups which disseminate this disgraceful material can be extremely cunning. Every effort that can be made by the public, the hon. Gentleman and anyone else to bring to the attention of the police the necessary material to find the perpetrators should be made.

I should add one thing. In relation to some of the other material, I draw attention to the recent amendment in the Criminal Justice Bill to add a section beyond section 4 of the Public Order Act 1986 to introduce a new offence of causing intentional harassment, alarm and distress.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware not only that the racial minority groups in Britain do not feel that the law adequately protects them against the evil of racism but that, five years ago, a report of the Home Affairs Select Committee recommended that the Crown Prosecution Service should monitor the outcome of all racial incidents cases but it has so far failed to do so? The Home Affairs Select Committee has again recommended that that action be taken. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider that recommendation more positively this time than his predecessor did last time?

The Attorney-General: I will certainly take up the point that my hon. and learned Friend makes. He will be glad to know that it is already being taken up by the Director of Public Prosecutions. Two steps are in hand. The first is that in Greater London, where many of the problems occur, awareness training is beginning for 300 members of the Crown Prosecution Service. Secondly, a working group is examining precisely the point that my hon. and learned Friend makes about monitoring, with a view to constructive action in the near future.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Attorney-General agree that where successful prosecutions are brought, the sentence should be more reflective of the hurt caused than of the oddity and eccentricity of the causer?

The Attorney-General: Without commenting on individual sentences, let me say that I well recognise the force of the hon. and learned Gentleman's point, and I am sure that it will be widely recognised in the relevant quarters.

Crown Prosecution Service

21. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the work of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): The Crown Prosecution Service dealt with 1,454,239 cases in the magistrates court and 114,521 cases in the Crown court in the past year, and is responsible for conducting prosecutions fairly, effectively and efficiently.

Mr. Barnes: The Crown Prosecution Service has issued a document in support of the victims of crime and is seeking to assist them according to its policy statement. How can the Crown Prosecution Service do that when, in many of the cases referred to it by the police—including cases of racial harassment, which we have heard about—it decides that there will be no prosecution? Is not there a requirement that there should be more effective prosecution by the Crown Prosecution Service so that victims can begin to be in a position where assistance can be given to them?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that the criteria that the Crown Prosecution Service applies in deciding whether to bring cases are clearly set out in the revised code, and I hope that the effect of the clarified criteria will lead to more prosecutions. In fact, the discontinuance rate, to which he referred, has fallen in the past year from 13.5 to 12.9 per cent. in the magistrates court and from 8.1 to 7.6 per cent. in the Crown court, so things are not quite as gloomy as the hon. Gentleman would have us believe.

Mr. Brandreth: I welcome the publication of the revised code of practice for Crown prosecutors, written as it is in good plain English. Can my hon. and learned Friend use this opportunity to praise the work of the CPS in Chester, especially its current priority of improved working relations with the police?

The Solicitor-General: I willingly do that. As well as being written in plain English, the code is written in plain Welsh.

Mr. John Morris: I welcome, with pleasure, the annual report of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Does the Solicitor-General agree with her view that the new code "may have the effect of bringing more criminals to trial"? Will he keep well in mind the disquiet expressed last autumn that, while the Home Secretary was presiding over an ever-rising crime wave, there were dozens of empty courts, especially in the Crown courts, because of the failure to prosecute? Can we be assured that the CPS will no longer lay itself open to be accused of pursuing fewer serious charges than justified, despite the dismay recently expressed by a senior judge at Snaresbrook Crown court?

The Solicitor-General: The facts do not justify that complaint. If one analyses the more serious cases that are dealt with in the Crown courts, one sees that the indictable-only cases component—that is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman and I, in the trade, call heavy cases—has gone up from 18 per cent. of completed cases in 1991-92 to 21 per cent. in the past year.

Sir Anthony Grant: Was the recent prosecution of PC Guscott launched by the Crown Prosecution Service or by the police? Whoever actually launched it, can my hon. and learned Friend tell the blithering idiots that they should have a little bit of common sense and that any such prosecutions in the future will be intolerable?

The Solicitor-General: The police referred the file to the Crown Prosecution Service which, applying the criteria which applies to all cases, decided that it was a proper case to prosecute. Let me emphasise that, in this country, prosecutions are taken without reference to any political pressure or any hue and cry that might result after the case is brought. Police Constable Guscott struck the young man in hot blood. He recognised that. He pleaded guilty when the charge was put to him.

Serious Fraud Office

23. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the work of the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office is currently working on the investigation and prosecution of 51 cases of serious and/or complex fraud.

Mr. Bayley: Does the Attorney-General support the proposal, which is being canvassed widely at the moment, that many serious frauds should in future be dealt with not by criminal proceedings but by City regulatory bodies? Has he looked at the most recent report from the SFO to this House, which shows that the average amount of money involved in the 48 cases under consideration when the report was presented to us is in excess of £100 million? If the courts are to be less used in future, at what level of money will a fraud be regarded as serious enough to press criminal proceedings in a court of law?

The Attorney-General: The cases that come before the SFO are, by and large, very big, heavy and complex cases. I agree that the SFO should consider carefully with the regulators whether there is a case for certain of the cases that it is considering prosecuting being dealt with by regulators. Where there is substantial plundering of public or private moneys by the alleged offenders, that is a proper case for prosecution in a court of law.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Malawi

29. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the ODA is providing to the newly elected democratic Government in Malawi.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We are increasing our aid to Malawi to help the new Government to pursue their economic and political reform programmes and to mitigate the effects of poor rains.

Mr. Spring: Given the attention that has recently been paid to the arrival of another democracy in Africa, will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the establishment of democratic government in Malawi? What discussions have taken place with President Muluzi about furthering relationships between the United Kingdom and Malawi?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's words. The new president was in Britain recently and met my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers. We wish to encourage the new Government, and this year we are increasing substantially our bilateral aid—of which we are the largest donor—to some £30 million.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Minister will be aware that awards given to Malawi in the past for medical help are being altered substantially. Will he undertake to look closely at the way in which overseas aid is granted? The fact that the people of Malawi were so determined to vote in their general election, and that it was such a fair and free election, is to their enormous credit and we must do everything that we can to help them.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I know of the hon. Lady's great interest in health matters in Malawi and her specialist knowledge of them. As she knows, we are making changes, with the aim of giving more emphasis to primary health care in rural areas, and we will be developing plans to do just that.

Sir David Steel: May I press the Minister to do more than simply welcome the election of the democratic Government in Malawi under President Muluzi? When will the British Government restore fully the cuts made on human rights grounds during the time of Dr. Banda?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have substantially increased our aid this year and I understand that it is as high as it has ever been, if not higher. That is as a result of the recognition that we should help that country, which, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, we encouraged to hold elections. I think that we have honoured what he pressing me on.

Gaza and Jericho

30. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he proposes to allocate for aid in Gaza and Jericho in the current year.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): We expect to provide £70 million over the three financial years from 1994-95 in help to the Palestinians and support for the middle east peace process. That includes our share of the European programme of help to the west bank and Gaza, our contribution to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and our own bilateral technical co-operation programme. My figure includes help to the rest of the west bank and to Palestinian refugees generally, as well as to Gaza and Jericho.

Mr. Janner: The right hon. Gentleman understands the importance of the Palestine Liberation Organisation succeeding in managing the economies of both Gaza and Jericho. May I thank the Government for what they have done so far in increasing aid, but ask that much more be done to ensure that that management proves highly successful in the future, because if it does not, there will be trouble for all?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely right. The administration of the Gaza strip and Jericho is not easy by any standards. We had begun by thinking that we would not give help for recurrent costs, but we are now doing so, in response to arguments from persons such as the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the Palestinian people's expectations that their living standards will rise are not fulfilled there is a danger that Muslim fundamentalists will increase their sway in that part of the world? Will he therefore press the European Union not only to give aid but to trade on an increasing scale with Gaza and Jericho?

Mr. Hurd: Immediate aid has been given, about which I have just given some account. Training programmes are also offered. For example, we are helping to train senior Palestinian police officers at Bramshill. Trade is also taking place, as my hon. Friend mentioned. It is also important that the Palestinian leadership should be seen to assert its control in the area and I hope that it will not be too long before Mr. Arafat returns Jericho.

Cambodia

31. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom is making to the clearance of mines in Cambodia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Since October 1991, we have contributed more than £1.7 million.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that we should undertake to make a long-term commitment to mine clearance in Cambodia? Does he also agree that, having once invested a considerable sum in undermining the Government of Cambodia, we should spend as least as much on aiding their survival in the wake of democratic elections?

Mr. Hurd: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. We join in offering substantial help to the new Cambodia. In June 1992, we pledged $30 million at the Tokyo conference. Of that, $24 million has been committed to specific activities and $14 million actually spent. We are clearly and rightly involved.

Mr. Lester: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that none of the mines laid in Cambodia were supplied from Britain but all came from other countries? Does he agree that the money and resources that we have devoted towards clearing them is greater than that given by the majority of other countries, because it is designed to try to give the Cambodian Government the facility to deal with the difficult problem?

Mr. Hurd: Yes. The second point is correct and I believe that the first one is also.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Secretary of State accept that land mines are a major obstacle to development in Cambodia and many other countries? Is he aware that one doctor working in Cambodia has said that land mines are being cleared an arm and a leg at a time? Does he accept that 10 times as many civilians as soldiers are killed by land mines and that the only solution is a complete ban on the export of anti-personnel mines?

Mr. Hurd: We supported last year's motion at the United Nations for a moratorium on land mine exports. There is a lot of confusion about the matter. We believe that there is still a legitimate role for land mines—for example, in protecting an RAF airfield. We believe, however, that there should be clear rules on their use, on how they should be placed and on what safeguards should be applied. Those rules are contained in the UN weaponry convention. We have now decided to ratify the additional protocols attached to the Geneva conventions and we hope that the whole process for this country will be completed by the end of this year.

Aid Programmes

32. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to target aid by ring fencing donations for specific aid programmes.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our bilateral aid is carefully planned to meet recipients' priority development needs. We monitor all stages of implementation to ensure that our contributions are used as planned and not diverted to other purposes.

Mr. Fabricant: I am relieved to hear that answer. My hon. Friend will know that I fully support the know-how and other funds given to the former Soviet Union, but does he accept that the Russian Federation is still involved in programmes such as the biopreparat—chemical warfare —programme? Therefore, is not it important that we ensure that the money is directed to where it is intended?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Aid diversion is a problem in all aid programmes and ODA officials are fully aware of that. We are not deeply concerned about diversion of our aid because we have procedures to prevent any damage of that kind.

AIDS (Central Africa)

33. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being provided to central African countries to deal with the incidence of AIDS.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: So far this year, we have committed some £49 million to health projects, up to half of which is for projects that deal with sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

Mr. O'Brien: With 9 million people in sub-Saharan Africa infected with HIV, that works out at about £4 a patient. It is not very good, is it? Does the Minister realise that, in many sub-Saharan countries, up to half the population is under 15 years told and therefore not sexually active yet? Is there not, therefore, the potential for a major contribution by this country to an education programme on that matter, which might begin to slow the progress of the disease?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As I touched on in my answer—I could explain it further in a discussion or letter to the hon. Gentleman—our contribution is not just for AIDS matters but for wider programmes of the kind that he describes. Those include educational and other programmes about sexually transmitted diseases and other such matters. If the hon. Gentleman studies deeper, he will find that ODA Ministers are directing their minds to that matter.

European Council (Corfu)

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the meeting of the European Council which I attended with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Corfu Council put another three building blocks in place in constructing post-Communist Europe. First, the treaties of accession signed with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden will help to create the wider Europe that we seek—a European Union that extends from the Atlantic to the Arctic. I warmly welcome the positive vote on accession in the recent Austrian referendum. I hope that referenda in the other three EFTAN countries this autumn will prove equally successful.

Secondly, we agreed in Corfu that the association agreements with our central and eastern European partners must be fully and urgently implemented; so should the United Kingdom-Italian initiative to link those countries more closely with the foreign affairs and home affairs pillars. That will help them to prepare for full membership of the European Union as soon as possible. Cyprus and Malta will also be involved in the next stage of enlargement.

Thirdly, the European Union signed a partnership and co-operation agreement with Russia, one of the most comprehensive agreements ever concluded between the Community and another country. President Yeltsin said that the agreement symbolised Russia's return to the economic life of Europe as an equal partner. He also pledged the support of his Government in bringing about stability in central and eastern Europe and his willingness to work closely over former Yugoslavia.

Russia has just signed the partnership for peace agreement with NATO and, on 9 July, President Yeltsin will play a full part in the political debate at the Naples summit. I warmly welcome Russia's increasing integration with western political institutions.

In the discussion of the problems facing people throughout Europe, I suggested a series of moves to combat drug trafficking and other international crime. The drugs problem throughout Europe is growing. Enough cocaine has been seized in the European Union this year alone to provide 24 million individual doses. I pressed for more effective cross-border intelligence gathering on drug trafficking. I urged the Community to strengthen the Europol drugs unit and to set up speedily the full European police office, which should have a wide remit to tackle organised cross-border crime. I underlined the importance of action within our own countries and suggested that the Union should hold a conference on drugs and organised crime, and should involve also countries in central and eastern Europe. I was glad to receive wide support for those proposals, which were endorsed in the conclusions of the Council.

We made progress on two economic issues high on the British agenda. First, we agreed that markets in telecommunications and energy should be further liberalised to give Europe's consumers access to wider, cheaper and more efficient services. Secondly, we strongly supported the German proposal to set up a European deregulation task force with business men as members, precisely as we have done in this country. That was agreed. The task force will help to cut back burdensome Community regulations on business.

The Council endorsed the macro-economic guidelines drawn up by the Economic and Financial Council on the conditions for sustainable growth. We agreed that it was essential to continue cutting public sector deficits and reducing inflation. I reported that the British economy had grown by nearly 3 per cent. in the year to this spring, and that unemployment had fallen here by more than 300,000 since the end of 1992. Britain remains the fastest-growing of the big economies in the European Union.

The Council approved a first priority list of 11 trans-European network projects. That includes the second channel tunnel rail link and proposals to improve the rail links between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Any contribution to the financing of such projects must come from within existing Community resources. At our insistence, the Council agreed that there could be no financial guarantee from the Community for the trans-European network. We believe that Europe's taxpayers must be protected against such open-ended commitments.

We heard further evidence that the subsidiarity principle is being successfully implemented. We expect the number of main legislative proposals coming out of Brussels this year to be about half the number of those in 1993 and one quarter of the total four years ago. That is a very significant improvement.

In external policy, the Council discussed Ukraine, and agreed to step up support for economic reform and nuclear safety there, tied to the closure of Chernobyl. That discussion will be taken forward with the United States, Japan and Canada at the economic summit in Naples in early July.

The Council once again discussed Bosnia. The contact group has done valuable work based on the European Union's plan, but there is an urgent need for the parties to show the will for a negotiated settlement if that process is to succeed. We agreed that the European Union would make every effort with the United States and Russia to bring the negotiations to the point of decision.

Let me now turn to the presidency of the European Commission. The treaty lays down that the Commission President should be selected by "common accord" to serve a term of five years. Common accord is vital. For the President of the Commission to serve the whole Community effectively, he must enjoy the confidence and support of all of its members.

Before the Corfu Council, we told the Presidency and other partners that we supported Sir Leon Brittan's candidature and believed a genuine consensus of all 12 member states to be essential. No one disputed the necessity of a genuine consensus.

When we heard that Mr. Dehaene was thinking of putting himself forward at a late stage, we privately informed the Belgian Government and other partners that we could not support him. We warned that it would not be possible for him to attract a consensus of the whole Community. We hoped, therefore, that his candidature would not be pressed.

Neither then nor at any later stage did any partner say that either Sir Leon Brittan or Dr. Lubbers, the two long-standing candidates, was unacceptable. Both, of

course, had outstanding credentials and long experience of the Community—Sir Leon as a Commissioner for six years and Dr. Lubbers from 12 years on the European Council.

At the Corfu Council, four states—representing nearly half the European Union's population—did not support Mr. Dehaene in the long discussion on the first evening. In several interventions, I made our strong views very clear to the Council, as I had in a number of bilateral discussions.

On the following morning, Sir Leon and Dr. Lubbers decided to withdraw their candidatures. Other European countries indicated that they could accept Mr. Dehaene. I maintained my position that we could not. I said that I had given the matter careful thought, and that our decision would not change at any stage. I reiterate that position in the House today. I suggested that consultations should be put in hand to find a candidate who had the support of all member states. The German Chancellor, who takes over the Presidency later this week, said that he hoped to resolve the matter speedily, if necessary by convening a special summit on 15 July.

Our position was not a personal criticism of Mr. Dehaene, although in our view Sir Leon and Dr. Lubbers had much stronger qualifications. For the next five years the Commission needs a President who is in tune with the times and the mood across Europe—a President whose instincts are with enterprise and competitiveness. Above all, Europe needs a President of the Commission who is selected with the full approval of all member states.

The Corfu Council has highlighted an issue of increasing concern to many European Union members—the way in which decisions are reached. It is an important point of principle that the key decisions require unanimity and that all member states should have an equal opportunity to participate in collective decision making. The procedures used for this decision, before and during the Council, were not satisfactory. There was no need for this matter to have come to an open division at a European Council; it should have been avoided. Had more comprehensive consultation taken place, as in the past, and had the views expressed by different states been heeded, it could have been avoided.

I believe that there are a number of well qualified people who could take on the post, on the basis of a genuinely common accord. We stand ready to play our part in consultations on it. There is no reason why that should not lead to an early and satisfactory outcome.

I wish to see Europe succeed. I want it to regain the affections of the people of Europe. I want a Europe with which all member states—now 12, soon to be 16, then 20—can all feel comfortable. Achieving that may mean disputes along the way. But being a good European does not mean signing up to everything that our partners do. At Corfu we fought for what we believe is in the best interests of this country and Europe. That is what we will continue to do.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement.

We warmly welcome the treaty of accession signed by Austria, Sweden, Finland and Norway, and agree that the result of the referendum in Austria was encouraging. We hope very much that it will be followed by positive results elsewhere in Scandinavia in the autumn.

As the Presidency conclusions confirm, all those countries will bring a great deal to the European Union—not just a net contribution to the Community's budget, but strong support for open government and for efforts to protect the environment. In addition, they are, of course, as the summit statement says, "in the vanguard" of support for the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty. That means that 15 out of 16 member states will support that chapter.

We also welcome the partnership and trade agreement with Russia, the financial support offered to the Ukraine to close the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, and the progress made on further enlargement, specifically the applications of Cyprus and Malta, which will be widely welcomed in the House, and of Poland and Hungary.

The Opposition are also delighted that the Corfu summit strongly reaffirmed the social dimension of Europe and, in particular, invited the Commission to make

"full use of the new possibilities available"

from the social protocol.

Another initiative that we welcome is the Council's agreement to involve the Social Affairs Council with ECOFIN and the Commission in further follow up to Mr. Delors' White Paper on growth and employment. We endorse the follow up to the White Paper, particularly the emphasis on education and training and the crucial need to maximise the potential of human resources—to invest in people.

The Opposition are pleased that at least all the other member states and all the new applicants rule out the economics of the sweat shop and agree with the Council that the agreement—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should hear this; they should hear what the Prime Minister has signed up to. We agree with the Council that the agreements on works councils, on the protection of young workers, and on the creation of an agency for health and safety at work all represent significant progress in the European Union's social dimensions.

We are also pleased—despite what the Prime Minister said—that the prospect of further finance to support the trans-European networks has not been ruled out, especially as one of the 11 agreed projects includes the channel tunnel rail link. Does the Prime Minister now accept—I seem to remember him boasting in the past of having vetoed it—that the worth of this project lies in the fact that it might help to redress the growing tendency for Britain to experience all the costs of membership of the EU while our Government resist the benefits?

Will the Prime Minister ensure that one of the first acts of the new Minister working on information technology will be to lift the unfair restriction on British Telecom which prevents it from entering the emerging market for television services? Does he not realise that the quickest way to build an information super-highway in Britain is to allow BT to compete with cable, which the Government refuse to do?

Can the Prime Minister confirm that, during the summit discussions on many of the issues that I have mentioned, and in particular during the positive discussion on the follow up to the White Paper on growth, employment and social policy, he was not present? Is today's report correct, that the right hon. Gentleman attended a three-hour discussion for only a few minutes and did not take the opportunity to speak? Does he recognise that what was agreed, apparently in his absence, enhances the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty—in stark contrast to the right hon. Gentleman's rhetoric?

How much of the right hon. Gentleman's sound and fury about the Commission Presidency is a smokescreen to

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

hide from his Euro-sceptics the fact that he has accepted a further strengthening of the social dimension in Europe and European intervention to promote jobs?

Has not this weekend been, not a triumph, but a humiliation for the tactics of a Prime Minister who claims to be an ace negotiator but who found himself, and Britain, relegated to the sidelines? May I anticipate the Prime Minister's standard response—that the Opposition simply do not understand how successful he has been—by pointing out that he went to Corfu to promote a British candidate for a senior post in Europe, won no support from any of his colleagues and ended up vetoing a Conservative? May I further remind him that my colleagues and I went to Corfu—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that Conservative Members want to hear this. We went to promote a British candidate for a senior post in Europe, and we obtained the unanimous support for that candidate of delegations from every one of 15 member states. We need no lessons from the Prime Minister on how to negotiate successfully.

Does not this point up the fact that the Prime Minister has once again put his own standing in Europe before Britain's standing and influence? Does he not realise that what happened this weekend weakens his chances of fighting successfully for reform of the common agricultural policy, and his chances of working to resist the further encroachment of VAT—issues that really matter to the people of this country? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the weekend's events show not that he is a Prime Minister who is strong but that he is weak, a prisoner of his Euro-sceptics, and that yet again it is the people of this country who will pay the price for his failure?

The Prime Minister: I never cease to marvel at the transformation in the right hon. Lady's attitude to Europe. She has slipped effortlessly from slavish and unthinking opposition to the European Community to slavish and unthinking support for everything that emerges from it. Can this be the same right hon. Lady who once said:

"If one believed, as many of us do, that the EEC is a prime obstacle to the policies we need, how can we be expected to put our consciences and principles aside and cease to fight to win?"

I shall spare the right hon. Lady the other eight quotations that I have.

I welcome what the right hon. Lady said about the accession treaty and the result of the referendum in Austria. I also welcome her support for the partnership and co-operation agreement—the further relationship with Russia and the actions on Chernobyl—and her support for the future enlargement of the Community to include Cyprus, Malta and four other countries, not just the two that she mentioned.

We do accept the social dimension, but her reference to the social chapter relates to those member states that have signed the social protocol, not to ourselves—something which the right hon. Lady may not have understood.

The right hon. Lady said that further finance for trans-European networks had not been ruled out, but I can tell her most emphatically that neither has it been ruled in.

On information technology, I welcome her support for competition—a little late perhaps, but none the less welcome.

The right hon. Lady referred to a discussion. There was a whole series of discussions over lunch and in plenary. The one in which I did not take part related to economic matters and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, quite naturally, spoke on behalf of this country. In every other discussion I not only spoke but set out this country's position very clearly.

The right hon. Lady spoke of her successful negotiations. She, like me, met members of the socialist group in Corfu. Did she urge them to support Sir Leon Brittan? *[Interruption.]* I hear the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), saying that she did not support the British candidate. Nor did we hear from the right hon. Lady whether, on an issue of principle and importance to this country, she would have maintained the British veto. She said not a word on that. We cannot get a clear answer from her on that any more than we can from the shadow Foreign Secretary, who has wriggled on every programme on which he has appeared.

The right hon. Lady also referred, without a great deal of knowledge, to the reform of the common agricultural policy—clearly not understanding that the enlargement of the Community to include the central and eastern Europeans would make it absolutely imperative that there was a root-and-branch reform of the CAP.

Mr. Kenneth Baker (Mole Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decision he took in Corfu at the weekend on the Presidency was not only right but courageous and popular—popular not just in the Conservative party but throughout this country and in many electorates across Europe? It is the Opposition parties who are isolated from public opinion in this country. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, in putting forward his new vision of Europe, that does not result in a Franco-German stitch-up?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. I made the judgment on the Presidency of the Commission—which is the most important executive post to be determined—on the basis of what I believed to be right for the European Union as a whole and right for this country. For the reasons I gave, and although I have nothing personal against Mr. Dehaene, I did not believe that he was the right person for that job. I believe that the decision taken will have a great deal more support across Europe than is being speculated upon by many Members on the Opposition Benches, and I have no doubt that it was the right decision, in the short term and the long term, for this country and for Europe.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Does the Prime Minister agree that the present fast-deteriorating situation in Bosnia gives grave cause for concern? If the present fragile and much-breached ceasefire does not give way to a negotiated settlement, is it not the case that we may well be witnessing a terrifying escalation in the war in Bosnia, with the probability that it will spread to the rest of the Balkan peninsula?

As to the Presidency, the Prime Minister's attempt to portray the Punch and Judy farce at Corfu as Henry V at the battle of Agincourt—with the right hon. Gentleman in the title role—is deeply unconvincing, to say the least. Is it not the case that everybody in Europe and most people in Britain realise that the Prime Minister sacrificed Britain's long-term influence and interests to obtain short-term

headlines in the Murdoch press and to deliver a large dollop of appeasement to the right wingers on his own Back Benches?

The Prime Minister: All the right hon. Gentleman achieves with interventions of that sort is to show how little he understands about negotiation in Europe and the issues at stake. I accept that there is a fundamental difference of approach to European issues between my party and the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. The right hon. Gentleman has been very frank. He does not consider the sovereignty of this Parliament important—he has made that perfectly clear. I disagree. He does not believe that we should maintain and exercise the right to veto. I strongly disagree. If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that on any occasion when this country may disagree with our colleagues in Europe we should automatically accept what they believe to be right and not what we believe to be right —which is the necessary consequence of not using a veto —he speaks for no one but himself and a tiny minority.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the situation in Bosnia is grave. The ceasefire is holding, but we must bear in mind that a ceasefire is all that it is. Even that is not satisfactory. Tragically, another young soldier of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment was killed yesterday. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must work extremely hard in weeks to come to turn the ceasefire into a settlement that will last.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the fact that he considered himself to be forced to use the veto is a matter for regret, not for rejoicing? I believe that he recognises that the inquest will continue a long time and will overhang the whole of the 1996 discussions about the treaty's future nature.

Does my right hon. Friend recognise, as I do, that Sir Leon Brittan would have made an excellent President of the Union? Does he realise that Sir Leon received no support from any other member state because of the widespread belief that the British Government would use all their powers to bring pressure to bear on Sir Leon to reorder the Community and not to develop the European Union? That fact must be faced.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's major task now is to concentrate on how to resolve the crisis—for crisis it certainly is? It is said to be a matter of principle. What is the principle? We all know that the veto is there and that it can be used—that is not an issue. The treaty clearly describes when the veto may be used. There is no matter of principle involved.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that he had nothing against the Belgian candidate. How does he propose to resolve the crisis and to find a suitable candidate? He said that there must be unanimity. Does that mean that only candidates acceptable to the British Government will be agreed to? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] It is not an issue on which there can be general agreement, which is what unanimity is about in a democracy—not domination by one particular country, but the work of all the countries put together.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has raised a number of points, and I should like to respond directly to all of them.

I share my right hon. Friend's regret that it was necessary to use the veto on this occasion. As I said in my statement, it should not have been necessary, and it could have been avoided had the degree of consultation that took place, for example, in 1984 been replicated. I very much hope that the matter can now be speedily resolved. There have been occasions in the past when the Presidency of the Commission was not approved at a European Council; subsequently, rapid consultations produced an outcome satisfactory to all members of the Community. I hope that that will be the case now.

I also share my right hon. Friend's view of the qualities of Sir Leon Brittan: he would indeed have been an excellent President of the Commission. I do not think that anyone who knows Sir Leon well would imagine that he would have done anything other than that which he believed to be right for the European Union. There is no doubt, in my opinion, that the excellence of his performance as a competition Minister during the past few years weighed against him in the minds of some of our colleagues when they considered who should be President of the Commission.

I believe that we need to resolve the matter with urgent bilateral contacts, and we are ready to take part in those contacts. The point of principle was not whether the veto should be used; as my right hon. Friend said, the veto is there, and it is there precisely to be used. The point of principle was the manner in which the consultations took place, and the manner in which the late candidature itself emerged.

As for the acceptability of the candidate, what I hope to achieve is a candidate who is acceptable to all members of the Community, not just to the United Kingdom. We are in this as one of 12, soon to be 16. The candidate must be acceptable to all member states. Although that cannot possibly mean that he or she would be the first choice of all member states, I think it perfectly possible to obtain a candidate who will be acceptable to all and who—in the next five years during which he or she has responsibilities to discharge—will carry the confidence of all member states. That is what I wish to achieve with all possible speed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Before we proceed any further, let me point out that—as the House can see—a large number of hon. Members wish to question the Prime Minister. I now want only very brisk questions; otherwise I shall use my discretion, and ask the Prime Minister to answer only one of the questions. I want to call as many hon. Members as possible on this important statement.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The Prime Minister has just underlined the importance of consensus. Does he think that there really is a candidate who has the support of all the Governments of the 12 member states —especially when they include a British Government who have just shown themselves to be under the thumb of the Euro-sceptics?

The Prime Minister: As to whether there is a candidate acceptable to all, the answer is yes. The next few weeks will prove that to be the case.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): In his efforts to promote someone who was manifestly a very suitable candidate —Sir Leon Brittan—how was my right hon. Friend helped by the statement of the Labour MEP who is now the leader

[Mr. Tom King]

of the European socialists, who said that even if the Council approved such a choice they would seek to defeat it in the Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of that statement, and, to my surprise, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has chosen not to bring it to the attention of the House.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Is the Prime Minister aware that in 1940, when I was 20, it was not considered any great crime to put Britain's interests before the then European consensus? Does he derive some satisfaction from the recent European elections, in which some Opposition parties showed a marked reluctance to put before the electorate proposals for further surrender of Britain's interests?

The Prime Minister: Although not every aspect of the results of the European elections was entirely to my satisfaction, my party certainly contested the campaign on European issues, while others signally failed to do so.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I congratulate the Prime Minister on standing firm against the blitzkrieg tactics of the French and Germans in promoting their candidate. Will he take the opportunity to remind the Europeans that Britain's especially good economic situation, compared with theirs, has arisen not just because of the brilliance of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's policy but because of our escape from the ERM? Will he give that message on their future economic climate as well as his splendid guidance on the Presidency?

The Prime Minister: In the past, I have expressed the view that the deregulatory policies—the supply side policies—that we are following are the right way to create jobs. On this occasion, it fell to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make those points, and he did so.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Why should Britain's interests suffer because we have a puny Prime Minister who is more concerned to reassert his authority —his enfeebled authority—over his rebellious and, indeed, ridiculous right wing than to work and co-operate for the future of that great role of a united Europe?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman speaks for the things that he believes to be important, and he must expect me to do the same; I did so on this occasion.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Has the Prime Minister anything to tell the House and the people of Northern Ireland about the talks that he had with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic during the Council? The agreement was that strand 1 of the talks would include only the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Government, yet, following talks, the Prime Minister announced on television that he and the Taoiseach were discussing strand 1 of the talks, from which the Irish Republic Government were excluded as the talks were internal to Northern Ireland. Having used his veto on one occasion—I agree with what he did—he should use his veto against the Prime Minister of the Irish Government, who keeps insisting that Northern Ireland should be part of his country.

The Prime Minister: No, my discussions with the Irish Prime Minister were not about strand 1, which has been the subject of discussions between the British Government and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. My discussions with the Irish Prime Minister related to political strands 2 and 3. We still have not achieved agreement, but we are making progress. We have commissioned further work.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): So far, so good: the Prime Minister has won the first battle over the Presidency, but there will be further rounds to be fought and it is the last battle that really matters. Does the Prime Minister agree that, in strengthening his position against an unwelcome candidate for the Presidency, he would do better to say that our basic objection is to the appointment of an open Euro-federalist as the President of the European Commission, and that our objection will continue if the Commission proposes any other Euro-federalist candidate?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman carried all his colleagues with him, but his intervention was entertaining from where I sat. He would expect me to consider all future candidates on their merits, and I will do so.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I warmly support my right hon. Friend's stand, which in due season will be supported not only by Britain but by many millions of people in the European Union. In setting up the preparatory committee for 1996 at Corfu—the so-called reflection committee, which will have two Members of the European Parliament as members—will he ensure that the House has an adequate and full opportunity to contribute to that committee and a full say in ensuring that we get the right kind of Europe after 1996?

The Prime Minister: I regard that as an extremely important point. The Heads of Government have agreed that a study group should convene in around a year's time to prepare for the 1996 intergovernmental conference. It is highly likely, although it is not a decision for me, that the Select Committee here may wish to take its own considerations and make its own representations directly to the study group. I believe that it would be right for it to do so. It may well be that other groups will also wish to put forward their representations, both to the British Government and to the study group. Clearly, this will be an important intergovernmental conference and it is vital, in my mind, that everybody who has a valid point to put forward should have the opportunity of doing so and the opportunity of discussing it.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): If the Prime Minister's objection to the appointment of the Belgian Prime Minister is essentially procedural in that the nomination was sorted out in secret, behind closed doors, will he, therefore, support proposals to make the European Union's system of appointments more open, more democratic and more accountable?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman bases his question on a misassumption. I have not said that my objection was procedural. I have said that the procedure was part of the reason why we complained. As a point of principle, the procedure was wrong. I also made it perfectly clear that, in my judgment, Mr. Dehaene was not the best

qualified candidate for the job. I do not believe that one should accept anyone other than someone whom one believes is fully qualified for this job. I also made the point that, on key policy issues, I did not believe that the approach that Mr. Dehaene favoured was right. None of those points is novel; I made them perfectly clear the other day and they should be clear to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not only important to ensure that we do not have a federalist as President of the Commission, but that it is essential that we do not have the Germans and the French running the European Community? We should use the reflection group which has been set up in Corfu to ensure that we reduce the role and the powers of the European Commission and the European Union so that we can be sure that we concentrate on the office and the institutions rather than on the man.

The Prime Minister: Whoever becomes President of the Commission in due course, I very much doubt that that person will exercise the influence and authority that Mr. Delors has exercised over recent years. The changing nature and enlargement of the Community make it extremely unlikely that anyone will exercise that authority again. That view is held not only by the British Government, but by the Heads of a number of other Governments.

On my hon. Friend's other points, I mentioned the increasing success of subsidiarity. On new legislation—I take the figures from memory—in 1990, there were about 180 new pieces of European legislation. In the first half of this year, there have been 25.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): If European co-operation extends, as it must and should, to cover the whole continent, is it not absolutely clear that we shall have to move to a different system under which the nations involved harmonise, by consent, through their own peoples and Parliaments? The real enemies of a new Europe are those who wish to seize all power and to put it in the hands of bankers and Commissioners who are not accountable and cannot be removed.

Is the Prime Minister also aware that the siren voices in this House, in the press and in the City of London are wholly unrepresentative, not only of opinion in this country, but of opinion in other countries in that huge continent? Those countries want to govern themselves and not to be governed by a political class who have contempt for the opinions of ordinary people.

The Prime Minister: I agree with co-operation by consent. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that in the Maastricht treaty we established pillars in three vital areas for co-operation by consent and agreement. There is no doubt that by consent the countries of the European Union can often exercise more influence collectively than individually. I strongly agree that that consent principle should be extended. There are areas for common decision where common consent would not properly work.

My concern is that the influence of some Europeans would move us too fast towards common decision, and not by co-operation or by common consent. That is where I fear that Europe would lose the affection of its people. I do not wish that affection to be lost. That is why I have argued for the nature of Europe that I set out in the election campaign just a few weeks ago. We must extend co-operation by consent; we shall seek to do so in future.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. Friend was quite right to say that use of the veto should be exercised with great reluctance, but, in the circumstances that he has described over last weekend, he was absolutely justified in exercising that veto. Will he now ensure that he works closely with the Germans, during their Presidency of the Community, to find a successor acceptable to all and to help the Germans who themselves have a difficult few months ahead with their elections? When the Council of Ministers makes a proposal, can it also give a job description so that it is quite clear to everybody what is expected of the new Commissioner?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly wish to work with the new Presidency as soon as it takes up its responsibilities to reach a common accord on a new Commission President as speedily as possible. I cannot yet say who that will be, but I think that there are a number of people who would be worthy of consideration. My hon. Friend makes a valid point about a job description.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Prime Minister said that there were two very good candidates available other than the one being discussed—Sir Leon Brittan and Dr. Lubbers. Will he assure the House that, if Dr. Lubbers's name were to come forward again, he would not use his veto, notwithstanding Dr. Lubbers's federalist tendencies?

The Prime Minister: I made it clear some time ago that, in the event that Sir Leon Brittan's candidature for the Presidency did not receive the support of colleagues, I could accept Dr. Lubbers.

Mr. Ashdown: But Dr. Lubbers is more of a federalist.

The Prime Minister: I could accept Dr. Lubbers. Whether Dr. Lubbers's name will come forward again seems very doubtful.

Mr. Ashdown: But he is more of a federalist.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has probably never met either of those gentlemen. He has certainly never sat and negotiated with them. He has certainly not sat round the table reaching decisions with them. He has certainly not met them in bilaterals time after time after time. The right hon. Gentleman should either speak about things about which he knows or say nothing.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister give us his assurance that any candidate approved by the British Government for the Presidency will pass the test of being in favour of Britain's opt-outs on the social chapter and the single currency and against a further move towards a united states of Europe?

The Prime Minister: We have those opt outs and we intend to retain those opt outs, so the position of the new President on those is not especially relevant. I shall repeat the point that I made a moment ago. I shall look at each candidate for the Presidency on their individual virtues and make a judgment on that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Would the Prime Minister help the House on a question of straightforward

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

fact? Is it true or is it untrue that, as reported in the press, his Chief Whip told him that if he did not exercise the veto he would be opposed this autumn for the leadership of his own party?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the hon. Gentleman categorically that no such conversation took place and no such advice was received.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Is not it important to the future of the European Union that proper consultation between member countries should take place before the summit meetings? How can it otherwise be the case that two well recognised figures, both eminently qualified—Dr. Lubbers and Sir Leon Brittan—were bypassed by a secret conclave between the French and the Germans at Mulhouse? That cannot be a satisfactory way in which to proceed, and it would be a bad day for this country and for the European Union if it were.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my right hon. Friend in what he says, and I have every expectation now that there will be a proper consultation over the next few weeks and that a satisfactory candidate, who will be accepted by all, will then emerge.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Prime Minister aware that, when all the clamour has died down and the flag-waving has ended, in a quieter period, he and others will have to make a choice about who is going to get the job? It would be fair if I were to ask him if he will he give a guarantee to the House that he will veto each and every federalist who is put up for that job.

The Prime Minister: If that was a job application, I would certainly veto the hon. Gentleman. I repeat the commitment that I gave the House a moment or so ago. I will consider every candidate on his merits, and I will not bind myself beyond that consideration.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): In stating my full support for my right hon. Friend's cool, determined and far-sighted representation of our country in Corfu, may I invite him to garner support and strength from the fact that the British people instinctively understand that the so-called European Union is increasingly in danger of becoming the latest vehicle for the age-old German desire to dominate Europe so that those who really have the interests of a democratic Europe of co-operating nation states at heart will need to work a good deal more effectively after Corfu to bring that about?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the Community is a collection of nation states, the voices of all of which need to be taken seriously and considered. There is no doubt that the Community must reach its decisions collectively and that no individual nation should have excessive influence.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Does the Prime Minister accept that I am familiar with the European views of Dr. Lubbers? Will he tell the House precisely how Dr. Lubbers's views on the future development of Europe differ from those of Mr. Dehaene?

The Prime Minister: Well, he is a free trader for a start. I think that that is rather important. He is much more in favour of subsidiarity and deregulation. He is not in favour of extra expenditure; and he is an Atlanticist. Would the hon. Gentleman like a longer list?

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, no matter how he had voted on the Presidency, he would still have had the niggling criticisms from the Opposition Benches? Does he accept that to put the interests of Britain first has to be the aim of any British Prime Minister? Does he agree that it is wrong for the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to make the statement that we have no influence at all in Europe unless we go along with plans that have been pre-arranged between Germany and France?

The Prime Minister: That certainly is the practical effect of what has been said by the Front-Bench Members of both the Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party. It is all very well saying that we seek co-operation and that a difficult circumstance would never arise so we would never have to use the veto. I am afraid that that is to live in cloud cuckoo land.

The reality is that from time to time, for very good reasons, there are matters in which every nation state finds itself at odds with its European partners. In those circumstances, unless the veto is maintained on matters which may be of vital interest to this country, we would inevitably have to follow the views of others, with no escape route whatever for the British. That is not an acceptable position to the present Government. I regret very much that it is acceptable to the Opposition and to the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): As the relevant article requires common accord, is there not a duty on all members involved to avoid action that could create common discord? The Prime Minister has told us that the customary procedures of consultation were not carried out on this occasion. If they had been, and bearing in mind the support that Dr. Lubbers had from a number of other countries, is it not likely that we would have had Dr. Lubbers as the President of the Commission?

The Prime Minister: I think that is quite possible.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Is my right hon. Friend aware that four nations which did not have a vote in Corfu will warmly welcome the stand that he took on the question of the successor as President of the Commission? They are Austria and the three Scandinavian countries, which do not want to join a European Union on 1 January that is dominated by a French and German axis.

Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the House is deeply disappointed that he has not released the remaining quotations from the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the Leader of the Opposition? In order that we may be aware of the principles of the Labour leadership on Europe, perhaps my right hon. Friend will release one a day for the next eight days.

The Prime Minister: There might well be occasions when it would be appropriate to release some of the others.

I very much believe that it is vital for Europe that the French-German reconciliation continues. All of us who look over a period of years believe that to be entirely right. I very much hope to see that continue and that the close relationship between France and Germany itself will

continue. Equally, we ourselves both seek and now enjoy a close relationship with both those countries and our other European partners. That close relationship does not mean accord on every subject; nor would it ever be likely to be the case with nations of such varied interests. But we seek a common accord wherever we can and we seek the best relationship not only with France and Germany but with France and Germany and our fellow partners in the European Union.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): What accommodation does the Prime Minister anticipate will be reached between the Turkish and Greek communities in Cyprus to enable Cyprus to be admitted as a member of the Community?

The Prime Minister: It is a considerable way off before Cyprus is likely to be admitted as a member of the Community. Certainly, if the dispute between the north and south is unresolved, it will be extremely difficult for Cyprus to be admitted to the Community. What we have said is that we will look at that and consider the case in the next phase of enlargement—that is certainly some years away.

But I share a view that I think the hon. Gentleman would accept: first, we must continue with the United Nations' efforts to try to find a satisfactory accommodation to the long-standing problem of Cyprus. We have, for example, had British troops there now for nearly 30 years, and other United Nations countries for a similar period, so we will continue to seek that accommodation. Secondly, although this is not yet a matter discussed with our European partners, clearly we hope that that dispute will be resolved before it is possible for Cyprus to become a member of the European Union.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the importance to the Belgian economy of the presence of European institutions in Brussels, it makes it doubly imperative that any Belgian candidate for the Presidency should receive the unequivocal support of all member states?

The Prime Minister: I believe that any candidate needs the unequivocal support of all 12 member states. I have no doubt that there are men of talent in each of the European countries—all 12 of them—who could perhaps serve as President of the Commission. It is not the nationality of the candidate that I consider relevant; it is the attributes that the candidate has.

Point of Order

4.26 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It arises out of Welsh questions when the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) referred to my constituency of Cynon Valley and the housing situation there. Not only did he not tell me beforehand that he would raise the matter; he also made a grossly misleading statement which I hope he will correct. He is not known for his courtesy in the House, but I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will point out to him the error of his ways.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me to deal with. Of course, the hon. Lady can use the Order Paper —I am sure that she knows her way round it—by means of questions or an early-day motion in order to correct the statement.

BILL PRESENTED

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES (No. 2)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones, supported by Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Peter Viggers, Mr. Ian McCartney, Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Mildred Gordon, Mr. Andrew Smith, Ms Marjorie Mowlam, Mr. Simon Hughes and Ms Liz Lynne, presented a Bill to secure a uniform provision of public lavatories by local authorities throughout the United Kingdom; to set certain minimum standards for such public lavatories; to require the provision of lavatories designed for persons with disabilities and the provision of nappy changing facilities; to make unlawful any discriminatory charging in respect of the use of local authority public lavatories; to make further provision in respect of turnstiles; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 July, and to be printed. [Bill 128.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

FEES AND CHARGES

That the draft Seed Potatoes (Fees) (Scotland) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft European Molecular Biology Laboratory (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 96 (Scottish estimates),

That the Estimates set out hereunder be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee:

Class XIV	Vote 7	Housing and environmental services, Scotland
Class XIV	Vote 8	Local environmental services and housing, Scotland.

Class XIV	Vote 13	Family health services (part), Scotland
Class XIV	Vote 14	Hospital, community health, family health (part) and other health services, Scotland.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Select Committees (Role)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Select Committee on Procedure of Session 1989-90 (HC 19), on The Working of the Select Committee System, and the Government response (Cm. 1532.)]

4.27 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I greatly welcome this opportunity to debate the role of Select Committees. It is 15 years almost to the day—the actual anniversary was last weekend—since the House approved a motion for reforming the Select Committee system and establishing departmental Select Committees to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the various Government Departments.

At that time, Norman St. John-Stevas, who was much involved in these affairs, said that it could constitute the most important parliamentary reform of the century. While that may have seemed a little over the top at the time, none the less there is some justification for saying that it has made a substantial difference to our procedures, and in many ways has been a considerable success.

It is almost four years since the Select Committee on Procedure reported on the working of the Select Committee system. The House should be grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and that Committee for the report which they produced after taking a great deal of evidence from all those who were concerned about these matters. The Government replied formally to the points raised in the Procedure Committee's report, but it is rather extraordinary that we have had to wait four years for an opportunity to debate it.

The Committee reached the conclusion that the departmental Committee system as a whole had proved itself a valuable and cost-effective addition to the House's ability to perform its proper function of holding Ministers to account. Certainly I believe that, in that respect, it has been a considerable success.

Looking back over the past 15 years to when the change was made and a new Administration came in under the then Mrs. Thatcher, it is strange to reflect that her most lasting contribution to political events may not have been the Falklands war or the miners' strike or even—in the light of what was said a few moments ago—her battles with various members of the EC, but the introduction of the departmental Select Committee system. That may be something of an irony, but nonetheless I think it is interesting.

I recall that some distinguished Members at the time—Michael Foot, Enoch Powell and others—said that we would draw attention away from the Floor of House were we to establish such a system. I do not believe that that has been the case. It is certainly the case that some Members have difficulty being both on the Floor of House and in Committee at the same time. The reality is that that there are no fewer than four Committees sitting at this moment whose Members are therefore unable to be with us this afternoon.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I just wish to correct a factual mistake by the right hon. Gentleman. Enoch Powell was a member of the Select Committee of

1976 which proposed the system of departmental Select Committees and, while he took some persuading, he came out in favour of that. He was a supporter of that idea.

Sir Terence Higgins: Enoch Powell certainly was a supporter of the idea, but he had some qualms that it would affect the Floor of the House. I do not believe that that has been the case. The crucial thing is that the system has greatly improved the ability of the House to hold Ministers to account. For many years, power seemed to be shifting from the House of Commons towards the Executive. That was reversed.

We all know that, at Question Time on the Floor of the House—not least because the questions change from moment to moment—it can be very difficult to pin a Minister down. It is also very often the case that, during a winding-up speech, a Minister will have little difficulty in avoiding the more difficult questions which have been put to him. It is a different ball game in exchanges in front of a Select Committee, where a Minister can be questioned for two hours or more. If the Minister is clearly on weak ground, the Committee can make that clear.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Can the right hon. Gentleman think of any examples off the top of his head when, on a crunch issue—an issue that really matters—a Minister has been held to account? I sat there when Leon Brittan, who has been much mentioned this afternoon, came before the Trade and Industry Select Committee on the crunch issue of Westland, and I realised how feeble the Select Committee' powers were.

Sir Terence Higgins: That is the exception which may prove the rule. The reality at that time was that it was difficult to pursue matters to a conclusion, and I think that that was an exception. In many other cases, it has been possible to pursue Ministers very effectively—not least, for example, on the Treasury Select Committee.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked for an example of someone being held to account, and Professor Joad would ask what we meant by "being held to account". It is noticeable that the person mentioned by my hon. Friend is not now a Member of this House.

Sir Terence Higgins: That may be the case.

May I also make an important point suggested during the rather excellent debate on procedure which we had only last week: that the House would be very different if it sat in a semi-circle, rather than in confrontation across the Floor of the House. I believe that current design of the Chamber is undoubtedly the right set-up. There is no doubt, however, that the semi-circular arrangement in Select Committees, where witnesses appear before an all-party group, has created an effective forum. That is especially clear, for example, on television.

It is also extraordinary that Select Committees seem to reach unanimous conclusions and publish unanimous reports, which never seems to happen on the Floor of the House. In the past 15 years, one of the undoubted strengths of the system has been the fact that Select Committees have published unanimous reports, across party lines. Those reports have correspondingly had a greater influence than would have been the case if those Committees had simply divided on party lines.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend also agree that it was extremely wise of the Select Committee on Broadcasting to insist that Select Committees, rather than merely the Chamber should be broadcast on television? As a result, although the public regard what goes on in the Chamber with some cynicism and contempt, they are greatly impressed by the work of those Select Committees.

Sir Terence Higgins: My hon. Friend has made a good point. In common with all hon. Members, I have received letters from constituents complaining about the behaviour during Prime Minister's Question Time, which is what most people watch on television. In contrast, I have received a number of letters from those who watch the affairs of Select Committees on television. They believe that those Committees provide a much more in-depth, civilised and sophisticated approach to dealing with political issues. That is extremely important to the standing of the House.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the right hon. Member give way?

Sir Terence Higgins: I shall gladly give way later.

Apart from holding Ministers to account, Select Committees have given officials a much higher profile than before. They are now subject to more stringent scrutiny than that which they may receive from their Ministers, who might be preoccupied with a great many other issues.

The role of the Liaison Select Committee—

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. Member give way?

Sir Terence Higgins: Let me make a little progress, please.

The Liaison Select Committee normally meets in private and rarely publishes reports, so its work is not generally understood. It has the important role of co-ordinating the work of the various Select Committees and resolving difficulties between them.

I have had the privilege of chairing that Committee for seven years, and it is surprising to note that I have co-operated and worked with no fewer than six different Leaders of the House. I seem to have survived in my position rather better than they have. Every one of them has been a great supporter of the Select Committee system. On the whole, the interface between the Liaison Committee and Government has worked remarkably well. I have also enjoyed similarly successful discussions with and co-operation from the Opposition, which is important.

There are problems of co-ordination from time to time —for example, because of the overlap between the work of the Public Accounts Committee and a departmental committee, when covering the same ground. Problems have also arisen about getting information from the Government, particularly when it is classified or confidential. We have, however, worked out a reasonable modus vivendi.

I should like to comment, on an all-party basis, on the role of the Whips in Select Committees, which I believe should be limited. I recognise that, if we are to have a Government majority on each Committee, while ensuring that some of those Committees are chaired by Opposition Members, that can be achieved only by consultation through the usual channels.

That system has worked pretty well on the whole, but I

[Sir Terence Higgins]

believe that, once the chairmanship of Committees has been agreed at the beginning of a Parliament—always a difficult task—the actual election of those Chairmen should be left to the Committees themselves. I have become concerned about the role of the Whips, for two reasons.

First, in the debate that took place on 13 July 1993, the view was clearly expressed that there was a rule that Committee Chairmen should not serve more than a certain length of time. I believe that there is no such rule, and that it was invented by the Select Committee on Selection at the time. It was absurd to suggest that such a rule applied only to one side of the House. I hope that we shall hear no more of that rule. On the other hand, we would not want to end up with a seniority rule such as exists in the United States.

I say all that with no personal interest, because I had already decided that I should not continue as Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee. I hope that a similar case, in which the hand of the Whips is clearly discernible, will not arise in future.

Similarly, as Chairman of an all-party Committee, it is appropriate that I be even-handed—I was deeply concerned about the events of recent months when restrictions on travel by the Opposition Whips inhibited Committees' work. That was totally counter-productive. Committees were not just prevented from travelling abroad, but the Education Committee, for example, was prevented from travelling around the country to visit schools. The Opposition's idea that that would annoy the Government was ridiculous. I hope that we can treat it as a one-off event. It is important that Committees established to serve the House should be able to operate in an uninhibited manner.

Mr. Faulds: In case my earlier "Hear, hears" were not recorded, I stand simply to put it on the record that I thought that the nonsense a few months ago was absolutely ridiculous, and typical of some of the rather raddled minds of the Whips. I strongly endorse the comments which the right hon. Gentleman has just made.

Sir Terence Higgins: It is clear from the expression on the face of the Opposition Whip that the hon. Gentleman's views have been duly noted.

May I say a word about overseas travel? Some of the comments that have appeared in the press are entirely misplaced. We operate on a budget which, compared to those of other countries, is extremely limited. The Liaison Committee seeks to deal with the matter stringently, so that we get value for money. In its report, the Procedure Committee suggested that there should be a sub-committee of non-travelling members on the Liaison Committee. At least we have moved some way in that direction.

I was originally elected as Chairman of the Liaison Committee because I was serving on that Committee and had a base, in that I was also Chairman of the Treasury Committee. In this Parliament, the view was taken that it was a conflict of interests if the Chairman of the Liaison Committee also held the chairmanship of another Committee. So it was decided that the Chairman of the Liaison Committee should not have a base Committee. That is the position in which I now find myself. It follows that I do not travel overseas with Select Committees, and can be impartial.

I strongly stress that travel proposals are examined stringently. Anyone who has been on one of those visits knows that they are hard work and of value to the Committees concerned.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman. I have sat under his chairmanship and believe that he is an extremely impartial, hard-working and intelligent Chairman of the Liaison Committee.

Will he emphasise strongly that, despite its best endeavours, the Liaison Committee is so mean with Parliament's money that Select Committees have to rush across time zones with little respect for the work which they are supposed to carry out? I have been on Select Committees on three occasions when insufficient time was allowed to members physically to recover from the travel which they were expected to do. That is damaging, and I hope that it will be taken into account in future.

Sir Terence Higgins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the commercial at the beginning of her intervention. Clearly we must strike a balance on those matters, and I hope that we do so as far as possible, taking account of the important point which she has just made.

The House may not be fully aware of an interesting development that has occurred largely at the initiative of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. It has carried out an experiment on so-called "video conferencing", whereby, instead of travelling overseas, a video conference links the Committee with witnesses abroad.

It raises some technical problems with regard to the evidence that is taken, the procedure of the House and questions of costs. None the less, we must examine it to see whether it enables Committees to take evidence from people overseas without the expense of them coming here, or the expense and time consumed by colleagues going overseas. That development may not commend itself to everyone, but it is well worth considering. We shall need to take careful account of the implications for the formal procedures of the House.

The other formal duty of the Liaison Committee concerns the selection of estimates days, of which we have three a year or, in practice now, six half days a year. I wish to disagree with the report of the Procedure Committee, because it suggested that those estimates days should be replaced by days for debate on Select Committee reports generally.

Estimates days are the only occasion when the House can debate the detail of public expenditure. They were introduced because the House was in an absurd position, with literally no opportunity to debate the detail of public expenditure. Although, to some extent, estimates days are a little artificial as, under Standing Orders, the House is allowed to debate only a reduction in public expenditure and not an increase, they provide an important opportunity for it to study the detail.

It is important that Committees' terms of reference say clearly that they are responsible for looking at the expenditure, policy and administration of the Departments concerned. No one who serves on Select Committees could doubt that the first of those items—expenditure—is not dealt with as thoroughly as the other two. The reason is largely technical. The form of the estimates is scanty, consisting of bare titles and figures, and Committees have found them difficult to assess.

Over the years, and since I left the Chair, the Treasury Committee has been assiduous in looking at the form of those estimates, and we have gradually seen the development of the departmental Select Committee reports, which incorporate much of the information that used to appear in the raw state in the estimates. Technically, it is important to have estimates days, but the new departmental reports provide Committees of the House with a real opportunity to study expenditure in a broader framework, and to deal with the merits of the case.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend take into account the fact that, in proposing subjects for debate that were not concerned with the estimates, on a number of occasions Committees put in rather fallacious factors about estimates, so that they could come forward, on an estimates day, and have those debated? I do not disagree with my right hon. Friend about the need to ensure that estimates can be debated, but, equally, an important Select Committee report that is not concerned with estimates should not be ruled out from debate because it does not deal with estimates.

Sir Terence Higgins: I entirely take my right hon. Friend's point. I suggest that we retain the estimates days, but also have an opportunity each year for a certain number of debates on departmental reports and the expenditure described in them, on the basis of the reports from the various Select Committees. Perhaps, as with the estimates days, the choice of which reports to debate should be left to the Liaison Committee.

This year, a "unified Budget" has been introduced—but it is a myth. It is not really a unified Budget. We have always debated public expenditure and taxation together, in the autumn statement and during the Budget debate. Nothing has been gained in that respect. However, there has been a substantial reduction in the amount of time that the House has for debating economic affairs.

Instead of the autumn statement and the public expenditure White Paper in the spring, and the Budget running through until August, we are now down to a single event each year.

At the moment, we spend nearly all our time debating taxation, not public expenditure. With a unified Budget, insteadof having more debate on public expenditure and therefore bringing the two sides together, we now have even less time for debating public expenditure.

I say to the Leader of the House that there has been a considerable saving in Government time as a result of the so-called unified Budget. I believe that a reasonable amount of that time ought now to be allocated to the debates on the Select Committee reports on the public expenditure described in the annual reports of the Departments.

The third leg of this argument, which emerges very clearly from discussions in the Liaison Committee, is that time is needed to debate other Select Committee reports. Some Committees, such as the Defence Committee, have set opportunities during the year for doing so; the Treasury Committee also, although on the limited basis that I have described, has a regular opportunity for doing so; many of the reports are "tagged", as the expression is, so that they can be used in debates on specific subjects, but still no regular time is available to debate the reports of Select Committees in general. We need a separate allocation for that, which would reflect the growing importance of the Committees and the growing respect in which they are held.

I shall briefly mention one or two subjects before concluding—one, mentioned in the Procedure Committee report, concerns Standing Order No. 116 and the issue of advanced copies of reports. There have been some problems about that. I know that one of the Committees, whose Chairman is unable to be here this afternoon, is concerned about it. I hope that we could amend the Standing Order to two sitting days instead of 48 hours. That would enable Committees, in exceptional circumstances, not to publish reports before the weekend, but to release them on an embargo basis and publish them on the Monday. I hope that it will be possible to do that.

The Procedure Committee has dealt adequately with powers. Committees have very great powers to require the production of persons and papers, but those powers do not extend to the summoning of Members of this House or Members of the House of Lords. I think that that is right. The Procedure Committee rightly draws attention to the fact that, although there was a slight problem with the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) some time ago, it is unlikely that anyone will refuse to give evidence if they are asked to do so by a Select Committee. The Government have adhered to their promise to ensure that Ministers do.

It is true that we may not summon Members of the House of Lords, although I was rather surprised at the comments of Lady Thatcher, who was invited recently to appear before the Foreign Affairs Committee, saying that she was not prepared to do so, as an ex-Prime Minister. She was entitled to say that she would not appear as a Member of the House of Lords, but to my knowledge no similar rule extends to ex-Prime Ministers. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and Lord Callaghan have, I think, appeared before Select Committees.

Mr. Ainger: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned accountability and the importance of the unanimity of reports, and now he has moved on to powers. Does he accept that it is important that topicality is also taken into account in specific reports, and that the Government respond to those reports in a reasonable time?

I mention that because the Transport Select Committee, of which I am not a member, published a report on search and rescue in west Wales and the Dover straits, and the evidence contained the information that a search-and-rescue facility would be withdrawn from my constituency on 1 July. That report, which recommended that the search-and-rescue facility was not withdrawn, was published on 29 March. The Transport Select Committee still has not received a response from the Government.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, in such circumstances, powers should be given to the Select Committee to obtain a response in a reasonable time?

Sir Terence Higgins: A specific provision already exists, as I think the Leader of the House will confirm—a time limit in which the Government are required to respond. I have on occasion pursued the matter when it appears that that time limit is likely to be exceeded, but I shall happily inquire into the matter that the hon. Gentleman has rightly mentioned.

[Sir Terence Higgins]

I shall make a point about the European Legislation Committee, which is a non-departmental Committee. Both it and the Public Accounts Committee in its traditional role, and especially its extended role with regard to value for money exercises, continue to serve a very important function. However, the position of the European Legislation Committee is extremely difficult. It considers about 800 to 1,000 Community documents a year, it recommends examination of about 300 to 400 a year that have legal or political importance, and it takes evidence on seven or eight every week from the Government.

In spite of the enormous efforts of this Committee, we must consider whether that is a satisfactory way to proceed. I have a hankering after the proposal that I made the previous time the subject was examined—that there is a case for the individual departmental Committees to have a Sub-Committee that considers European affairs.

The departmental Committees have the expertise, whereas the ad hoc Committees that meet in the morning move from subject to subject and have no serious expertise on the specific matters that are being discussed. It might be necessary to augment that Sub-Committee with volunteers who are specifically interested in European affairs. I hope that we may reconsider that proposal.

Finally, I make two arguments about the future. First, I have been deeply worried, as was the Procedure Committee, about the delay in establishing Committees at the beginning of a Parliament. The problem is that, at that crucial moment, no one in the House represents the interests of Select Committees. Therefore there is prolonged delay, not only while the Government are appointed—that takes place very quickly—and not only while the shadow Cabinet is appointed, but afterwards. The Procedure Committee report said that, on previous occasions, about one eighth of a whole Parliament had passed before the Committees were set up.

Before the next general election, we need to establish some mechanism for ensuring that that delay is not as prolonged as it has been in the past. However, I pay tribute to the present Leader of the House, who was extremely helpful in setting a record—but not a very good one—in getting the Committees set up after the most recent general election.

It is a real problem, because the staff are sitting doing nothing, the Committees are unable to proceed with the work, and the Government remain unscrutinised during that period. That is a very important issue, which we need to tackle very shortly, so that the mechanism is in place before the next general election, either by setting a specific time limit or making an arrangement about the time expiring after the shadow Cabinet and the Cabinet have been appointed.

I do not believe that our system will ever develop into the American system, as there is a fundamental difference between our two constitutions. We have a system in which the Executive comes from the legislature, which necessarily means that Select Committees cannot have effective functions in the same way as those in the American system.

I believe that the Committee system in its reformed state is a substantial improvement on the previous system. The amount of work done in Select Committees is not generally appreciated by the public at large, but it is valuable. We need a firmer link between the Committees and the extent to which their reports can be debated on the Floor of the House. I hope that we can make further progress on that.

5 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I was a member of the 1976 Procedure Committee which first proposed the establishment of a system of investigative departmentally related Select Committees. It is not revealing any secrets to say that our proposal was a compromise between those who merely wanted to keep the Expenditure Committee system—including Mr. Enoch Powell—and those of us, including Phillip Whitehead, who has just been elected as a European Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) and myself, who wanted a much more ambitious system.

Eventually, after a long debate and an all-day seminar session—in which we persuaded Mr. Powell that a departmentally related Select Committee system would merely draw out the implications of the Expenditure Committee system of the 1960s because that system included a series of Sub-Committees—we came up with the following ideas. We stated at the time:

"a new balance must be struck, not by changes of a fundamental or revolutionary character in the formal powers of the institutions concerned, but by changes in practice of an evolutionary kind, following naturally from present practices."

That was a nod to Mr. Powell. We said:

"We have approached our task not in the hope of making the job of government more comfortable, the weapons of Opposition more formidable, or the life of the backbencher more bearable, but with the aim of enabling the House as a whole to exercise effective control and stewardship over Ministers and the expanding bureaucracy of the modern state for which they are answerable, and to make the decisions of Parliament and Government more responsive to the wishes of the electorate."

We hoped that the investigative Committees would

"become the 'eyes and ears' of the House in relation to Government departments, drawing the attention of Members to matters which require further political consideration and providing Members with advice and informed comment which can nourish the work of the House in scrutinising and criticising the activities and proposals of the Executive."

That was what we were trying to do.

We were fortunate to have as Leader of the House of Commons when the Thatcher Government first came to power, Norman St. John-Stevas. I am not certain that the then Prime Minister, now Lady Thatcher, knew what was happening when she set up the Select Committees. That system was very much the baby of Norman St. John-Stevas, who took the proposals of the Procedure Committee—I am sad to say that they had not been implemented by the Labour Government, partly because the then Leader of the House, Michael Foot, was against the idea—and ran with the ball. As soon as the Conservative Government came to power he introduced the proposals.

Norman St. John-Stevas saw the new system as the most important parliamentary reform of the century. I think that that was going over the top. He implied that if departmentally related Select Committees were set up it would enable us to change the balance between Parliament and the Executive. I think that he had an inappropriate model in mind and thought in terms of the American committee system. As the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said, comparison with the United States of

America is inappropriate. There is a separation of powers in America, with a weaker party system; America operates in a different political framework.

When departmentally related Select Committees speak, Governments do not fall and Ministers do not resign.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Pity.

Mr. Radice: It is a pity perhaps, but that is the reality. But the Committees have been a success. They have become the focus for ideas, pressures and debate. If my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was still in his place I would have mentioned the good work that his Committee, the Select Committee on Social Security, has done on social security and, in a previous form, on the national health service. The hearings and reports of Select Committees influence the climate of opinion in the country.

As was mentioned by my right hon. Friend—I wanted to call him my right hon. Friend because he is my friend—the Member for Worthing, Select Committees help to call Ministers and civil servants to account. We do not expect them to resign, although occasionally they should have done so, but they come before us to answer a series of questions on their policies and decisions. The departmental Committees provide a good forum—a much more effective forum than the Floor of the House of Commons. In Question Time any Minister who is on form, well briefed and worth his or her salt will be able to answer questions on an issue as there will not be a sustained series of questions.

In a Select Committee, if a Minister has a serious problem and is asked a series of questions by a well-briefed member of a Select Committee, he or she will find it much more difficult to evade the question. If he or she does evade the question, it will be obvious that that is precisely what is being done and when, as at present, the proceedings are on television or radio, that can be telling. It is no accident that the 6 pm and 7 pm news often carry the proceedings of Select Committees as that is where Ministers let their guard drop for a moment or two and occasionally come out with information that is embarrassing to the Government.

I remember asking the present Chancellor of the Exchequer a series of questions on the impact of the Budget. I asked him whether it was not the case that if the two Budgets were put together the combined result would amount to 7p on the standard rate of tax and he said yes. I do not think that he would have said that on the Floor of the House of Commons, but he did so in the Select Committee. It was a revealing moment that was picked up by the popular press precisely because it was shown on television. In an odd way it helped people to realise that the Government had raised tax considerably. But if one listened to the Budget one would not have gained that impression. That shows how Select Committees—through the different format of the hearings—can influence debate in the country and the public's knowledge.

The departmentally related Select Committees are fortunate in having their own radio and television programmes. I have met people who have watched on television or listened on radio to those programmes, sometimes in their baths at 11 o'clock on a Sunday night, and who like to talk about them the next day—so we have our fans, and the programmes are clearly effective.

The point has also been rightly made that, in these Committees, an element of consensus can develop which is impossible on the Floor of the House. Of course, it does not go very far; if there is a major policy difference between the two parties, it cannot be papered over in a Select Committee. But the very fact that the views of the parties can be rehearsed in a hearing represents a plus for Parliament. Indeed, sometimes the hearings are more important than the reports that we issue. That sometimes applies to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, when it is difficult to get a consensus—although the right hon. Member for Worthing would agree that our analyses are often better than those of the Treasury: they certainly stand the test of time better.

A word about reforms. I heartily agree that we need to protect the system against the party Whips. I do not want to go over history here, but the way in which a couple of Chairmen were leaned on and got rid of at the beginning of this Parliament was little short of scandalous. It is perhaps a pity that we took our retaliation—during the divisions between the two parties earlier this year—on the Select Committee system. I hope and am sure that that will not happen again.

It is fair to say that Government responses to Select Committee reports are sometimes so bland as to make them rather pointless. I have been looking at one or two Government responses to Treasury Select Committee reports, and they are good examples of what I mean. On the whole, Governments try not to take reports too seriously, particularly if they criticise the Government. Perhaps those reports need to be better linked with debates on the Floor of the House. Many years ago the Procedure Committee recommended eight such debates a year; we still have only three.

The development of the next steps agencies has not been fully taken into account by the Select Committee system. Now that nearly three quarters of all civil servants operate in agencies, the Select Committees must respond to that fact more effectively.

There may be a case in this for more specialist staff for the Committees. Hon. Members should remember that there is in fact no limit on the number of specialist staff that Committees can have. It is therefore up to us: if we see the need, we have to do something about it. A careful look should be taken at that.

My last point about the reforms concerns "the sending for persons and papers", in which area Select Committees have on a number of occasions been blocked by Government. The Westland affair was one occasion when Select Committees wanted certain members of the Executive to come before them but were blocked by the Prime Minister of the day. The problem was either that there was no majority on the Committee for insisting on attendance, or that the alternative meant coming to the Floor of the House, where the Government's majority would have come into play. So the power to send for persons and papers was inoperable.

In most cases, of course, Governments are prepared to accept Select Committees' demands, although the Osmotherly rules, drawn up by the Executive—without the support of Parliament—to govern how civil servants should operate before Select Committees, stipulate that civil servants appear to answer on behalf of Ministers, and only if Ministers want them to. There is a possible conflict between departmental Select Committees and Government Departments; it does not usually come into play, but it has done on occasion and it will again.

[Mr. Radice]

We therefore need to tighten up the rules in that area. Select Committees should not have to come to the Floor of the House to obtain their powers when they are challenged by Ministers or Governments. They should just be given full powers to send for persons and papers. That would give them the strength that they need when Governments try to resist them.

As an example of conflict that can arise between the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the Government, I offer the fourth special report on the proposed attitude survey of the civil service. It might be thought sensible of the Committee to want to ascertain the views of civil servants before reporting on the future of the civil service. We have said that we do not believe that Sir Robin Butler, or the Minister, or the trade unions, can necessarily tell us the views of civil servants on a number of key issues—hence we needed to conduct a survey of attitudes.

We certainly realise that this is a delicate matter, and we have said that we are prepared to co-operate with the Government and to submit questions to them. Unfortunately, that offer has been rejected outright by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. We have published his correspondence on the subject, which reads like a script from "Yes, Minister". It has certainly caused some laughter among Members of Parliament and journalists.

In the correspondence, the Chancellor argues that our questions are political, that they are concerned with Government policy, that they would help to politicise the civil service and that they would set a dangerous precedent. The Committee, with its Conservative majority, was united in disagreeing with that view. We said that the views of civil servants on the management matters that directly affect them are very different from matters of policy. And it is about the former that we want to ask questions, not about policy.

Secondly, we say that we are a responsible, cross-party Committee with a built-in Tory majority and with no interest in politicising the civil service. Thirdly, we point out that the Government, academics and trade unions have asked similar questions in the past. Sir Robin Butler says that he does not want outside bodies interfering in the relationship between him and the civil service. I pointed out in return that I did not think Parliament or its departmentally related Select Committees were just any old outside bodies. We represent the taxpayers; as such, we are perfectly entitled to find out the views of civil servants. That is what we have been trying to do, but we have been blocked.

Although we have issued a report, there is probably no way in which we can proceed to conduct an attitude survey at the moment. We could table a motion, but then we would draw into play the political majority on the Floor of the House, where other considerations also apply. That is why I have come out this evening in favour of giving the departmentally related Select Committees the power to send for persons and papers—precisely so that we can conduct an attitude survey of that type.

The reforms introduced by Norman St. John-Stevas and proposed by the Procedure Committee of 1976 have provided a useful additional and effective weapon for Parliament in the scrutiny of the Executive. All those who were involved in that should be congratulated, as should hon. Members who do the work in the departmental Select Committees. On the whole, they do a good job. The Committees are one of the most hopeful features of this Parliament.

But it would be wrong to be complacent. We must consider ways in which the system can be reformed and in doing so we must remember that that is not just in the Government's hands, but in our hands, too.

5.20 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) on bringing about this debate. The report on the working of the Select Committee system was published in the 1989-90 Session of Parliament, so I hope that we are not returning to the old structure of delayed debates on Committee reports which I thought that we had improved. Indeed, I recently congratulated my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council on holding a debate fairly quickly after the publication of the Procedure Committee's most recent report.

I also thank my right hon. Friend for apologising to the House on my behalf for my absence during a debate on a procedural matter a week ago. The debate was announced only on the previous Thursday, when I was already on my way to the far east to represent Parliament in a certain matter. I wrote to both my right hon. Friend and to the Liberal Democrats, who initiated that debate, apologising for my absence.

The creation and the working of the departmental Select Committees have been a considerable success. That success is absolute and definite and no one can deny it. At no time before their creation could Back-Bench Members have a Minister or senior official sitting in front of them answering questions solidly for two and a half hours, if necessary, on the subjects for which that Minister or official was directly responsible. It is not like Question Time, when a Minister has to respond to only two or three supplementary questions. If a Select Committee is doing its job properly, it can persevere until it either obtains an answer or shows up the inadequacy of the Minister in dealing with the matter before the Committee.

Perhaps even more important—although this is not always accepted and has not yet been mentioned in the debate—is the fact that any Secretary of State will say that his Department is now much more aware that its actions or the actions of its Ministers are liable to be open to the closest parliamentary scrutiny in way that has never previously been the case. Therefore, Departments are much more acutely aware of acting in ways that are acceptable to Parliament and do not run the risk of appearing to ride roughshod over parliamentary restrictions or opinions. That is of considerable importance.

The Select Committees have been successful, but can they be improved? The answer must be yes. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has made some suggestions for achieving that. I want to make three suggestions. The work rate of some Committees could be improved. Perhaps they could consider more than one subject at a time. I accept the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing that the financial spend of Departments should be more closely examined. Often, that is not a popular thing for the Committees to do; it is not as sexy as a political or policy inquiry. However, it is

important that Chairmen look more closely at how they examine the estimates of the Departments that they are monitoring.

On administration and policy, it is important that Select Committees follow up their reports to determine how, and in what manner, the Government have reacted. Once a Committee receives the Government's response, it should look at the matter again, not just let it die as though it did not matter any more.

The 1989-90 report was extensive, running to 80 or 90 pages, and extensive evidence was taken. For students of history, it is important to recognise the closeness of the examination. It is of interest that one of the major factors was the unanimous view of the Committee that Select Committees should not be turned into something akin to the American congressional investigatory committees, usually staffed and run by young lawyers and ambitious research assistants out to establish their reputations. The view of the Procedure Committee was that our Select Committees should be dominated by Members of this House and that their effectiveness should be assisted by the proven excellence of the Clerks in the Clerks Department and by the Committee's ability to call on specialist advisers when necessary.

I must point out to the hon. Member for Durham, North that there is no restriction on the number of advisers or experts on whom the Committee can call for assistance if it thinks that to be necessary. However, they do not have to be a permanent staff. There need not be a build-up of people permanently on the payroll. Paragraph 93 of the report said about additional staff:

"present staffing levels are probably about right . . . and I fear that if we had more staff our inquiries might become staff-driven rather than being Member-driven as they are at present."

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I accept what the right hon. Gentleman is saying about not having excessively large staffs, but it is also important that the Clerks Department should be given proper weight when delegations go abroad. The Clerks are absolutely essential to the taking of evidence and the recording of minutes. I want to follow up a point that I made previously and emphasise that it would be quite wrong if, for any reason, delegations were allowed the services of only one Clerk. That would be quite unfair on a 10-day visit. It would also be counter-productive.

Sir Peter Emery: I respect the hon. Lady's views, but I am diametrically opposed to them. I believe that unless a Committee divides into two parts and therefore must have a Clerk to deal with each of those parts, it is quite possible for one Clerk to deal with a Select Committee. After all, he should not have to nurse hon. Members; they are adults who should be able to look after their own arrangements. They should not have to rely on being herded around by a Clerk. They should be responsible enough to be on parade when they are meant to be. My judgment is that, in the spending of money, one Clerk will do in most instances —but that view is not unanimously held by the members of the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing.

Paragraph 162 states:

"There is little or no demand from Select Committees for any increase in their powers to send for persons, papers and records."

That view was held by almost every Chairman that we interviewed.

I noted with interest the point made by the hon. Member for Durham, North—and it is nice that we can begin debating matters, which is not always the case. However, the Government must have some protection, to be able to ensure that their view can be heard and perhaps accepted. I urge the hon. Member for Durham, North and his Committee to table a motion to be considered on the Floor of the House. It may be that the Government, rather than debate the matter in full, would give way. There are different ways of applying pressure. The structure that we set goes further than perhaps the hon. Gentleman imagines, in the way that he interpreted the position in his arguments.

Mr. Radice: That is probably good advice, and I will communicate it to the Chairman of my Committee. It may influence him and other members of the Committee in future. I say only that it is problematic. The right hon. Gentleman implied that Select Committees will go in for irresponsible surveys that have no purpose or point other than to embarrass the Government. I am sure that that is not the case. It has not been my experience as a member of Select Committees over a long period and as someone who entered the House many years ago. It is about time that we trusted the parliamentary side with a little more responsibility. If we do not, we will be blocked if we try to extend its power and influence.

Sir Peter Emery: This is the first time in 14 years that such a matter has arisen. The last occasion was the Westland affair—but that was different, in that the witnesses were blocking the way. Both the Ministers called blocked the situation. It was not so much the Committee's inability to get papers as the inability to break down the defence that two different Ministers were making.

Certain important recommendations made by my Committee in 1989-90 have been implemented, for which I thank the Government. We recommended that the Health and Social Security Select Committee should be divided with the splitting up of the Department of Health and Social Security. We insisted that there should be a Scottish Affairs Select Committee. That took some time, but it eventually came about in 1992. We pressed for a joint committee with the other place or a sub-committee on science and technology, and we now have a Select Committee dealing with that subject.

We also ensured that when new Departments are established, a Select Committee is created—as happened with the Select Committee on National Heritage. We also insisted and insisted and insisted that there should be a Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, which was the last of our recommendations to be adopted.

Procedurally, exchanges of evidence between the Public Accounts Committee and departmental Select Committees, which were something new, have been accepted, and Standing Orders Nos. 122 and 130 were amended to allow Select Committees to call on the Comptroller and Auditor General. Select Committees had not fully considered the use that they could make of the CAG in their work.

The recommendation that the remit of the Home Affairs Select Committee should include the work of the Law Officers' Departments was also adopted, as was the proposal for a maximum of one hour's debate on motions to replace Committee members, with the amendment of Standing Order No. 14. I give those as examples of the Government working to meet the Select Committee's

[Sir Peter Emery]

recommendations. I thank them for that, despite my criticisms of the Government for not debating the issue for some time.

I draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council three recommendations that were not adopted. The first has already been mentioned. We recommended that the embargo on the publication of reports under Standing Order No. 116 should be amended from 48 hours to two sitting days, which would allow for the weekend factor. That is still a problem and, after close consideration, I do not believe that the Government's objection to that proposal stands up.

Secondly, I said earlier that departmental Select Committees should be able to ascertain cases to take up in respect of the National Audit Office. The Government did not object, but that recommendation does not seem to have been adopted.

Thirdly, the Committee urged greater use of a Special Standing Committee on Bills, which has not happened. I hold the Government to blame for not dealing with that matter. Every Minister who has piloted a Bill that passed through a Special Standing Committee—there is evidence of this in our report—said without exception that it greatly helped. The Whips' concept that such a procedure automatically delays the Standing Committee was negated by evidence from Ministers, including that from one well-respected Secretary of State in the present Government.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): That is one of the report's most important and valuable recommendations. If it helps the right hon. Gentleman's case, we would be willing to consider timetabling to make such arrangements work.

Sir Peter Emery: I must consider the hon. Gentleman's exact words, but that sounds like a major step forward. I am delighted to hear that from a member of the Labour Front-Bench team because that proposal would not hurt the Government but would help Parliament. It would certainly help outside bodies to know that their evidence would be fully and properly put to a Select Committee.

The report's general conclusion is that Select Committees work effectively and are most efficient when there is no strong political division on the matter under consideration. Select Committees and their reports are of most use and influence when they reach unanimous conclusions. When a conclusion embraces all political opinions, that has a considerable effect on the Government, who must take note of what is said. Most Committee Chairmen realise that inquiring into a politically motivated subject does not get anywhere, because that is not the best way to proceed.

What really interests me is the fact that the vast majority of reports from departmental Select Committees have been unanimous. The House can work in unity, although the press often suggests otherwise, and what the television cameras show at Prime Minister's Question Time makes nonsense of the idea. When hon. Members are giving serious consideration to important subjects in Select Committees, they are able to reach a unanimous view: that is the strength of Select Committees and of our political system. Select Committees hold the Executive to account, which is what Parliament is here to do.

5.40 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): It could be said that a little local difficulty in the Select Committee on Trade and Industry precipitated this debate: some of the views expressed to the Liaison Committee on its behalf probably gave rise to the need for such a debate on the Floor of the House.

Unfortunately, I am not as well prepared as I should be. The Select Committee returned at the weekend from a visit to South Africa; when I left on the previous Friday, my Whip told me that there was a three-line Whip tonight—not on this subject—but when I arrived home, I found that the Committee Clerk had sent me a note asking me to come down this afternoon to take part in the debate. In any event, I wish to raise some points of principle.

In October 1992—for the first time ever, I believe—a motion was tabled asking for a report to be prepared by a Select Committee on the closure of 31 pits in the United Kingdom. That was a politically charged debate; the Government made something of a concession in requesting the Select Committee to deliver a report to the House—they did not ask for a referral. It is important that Select Committees are not brought into disrepute and used by Governments as safety valves to resolve politically charged situations, but I think that that is what happened then.

When we presented the report with its 31 recommendations, those recommendations were carried nem con. I had approached the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, the Leader of the House and the President of the Board of Trade, asking not only for the report to be debated on the Floor of the House—which it was—but for the recommendations to be voted on. Unfortunately, that did not happen: although the Chairman of the Liaison Committee made strong representations to the Leader of the House, he was unable to secure the necessary time.

That would have been possible only if the Government had allowed a procedural motion, enabling you, Madam Speaker, to select not just one but two or even three amendments to the motion relating to the White Paper and the Committee's report.

Two inquiries were running simultaneously at that time. The Select Committee's inquiry was transparent, in that some 97 per cent. of the evidence received was in the public domain: I believe that the taking of evidence was televised extensively. Also in progress was the Government's inquiry into the closure of the pits, which took place in camera—although some of the evidence emerged via the Select Committee. The reports were debated, but we were not allowed to vote on the Select Committee's recommendations. Try as I might, I—as the Committee's Chairman—was unable to bring that about.

It was a disappointment. The Government should not table a motion requesting a Select Committee to conduct an inquiry and compile a report, and then deny the House the right to vote on the Committee's recommendations. I accept what the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said about general debate on estimates, and the tabling today of a motion allowing a special debate on Select Committees; but I think that we should also consider Select Committee recommendations. We should explore the possibilities, and consider whether it is best for us to engage in debates such as this on a motion for the Adjournment, or to have the right to vote on such recommendations.

I agree with a number of hon. Members who have spoken that the strength of Select Committees is unanimity of purpose: without that, the system would fail. A few weeks ago, during a discussion on the subject, someone observed to me that Select Committees provided the only opportunity for consensus politics in our adversarial system. I accept that such a system is probably right for the United Kingdom, but it should contain a little island of consensus politics.

Why was a Select Committee containing a Government majority able to reach a certain decision on a controversial issue such as the closure of those 31 pits? Partly, I believe, because when evidence is subject to scrutiny an argument becomes compelling. Although political dogma will come into play from time to time, a logical consensus will be reached by people who sit in a Committee for two or three months, taking evidence twice a week, with all the evidence and the background before them.

As an eminent person who is now in the House of Lords said to me, had the poll tax—among other major issues—been subjected to the same process, a saner view might have prevailed, and the tax might never have been introduced.

As I have said, it is wrong for Governments to do what I believe the Government did at the time of the coal inquiry, and use Select Committees as safety valves to defuse politically charged situations before a proper debate can take place.

It was unfortunate that the Chairman of the Liaison Committee mentioned video conferencing immediately after he had spoken about Select Committee visits. My report to the Committee was very carefully worded. I hope that the Committee will consider the matter, and that the Leader of the House will also take it on board.

Using new technology, the inquiry into fibre-optics was able to take evidence from two high-ranking Americans that we could not have obtained without video conferencing. We should consider such facilities for the House, especially in view of our position in the European Union: I understand that Brussels has them. Perhaps they could be installed in Parliament street, where the new developments are taking place. We could use such state-of-the-art technology for a number of purposes, not just in Select Committees. I am sure that the excellent evidence that we have obtained from our two American witnesses will have made our report more authoritative.

My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) raised an interesting point about the development of next steps agencies and quangos. A number of people have expressed concern about the continued removal of powers from the House,because—as my hon. Friend pointed out—of the number of civil servants who are employed by agencies.

A review similar to that suggested in the 1989-90 Procedure Committee report, should be conducted of the future role of Select Committees in, for example, the procedure outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and video conferencing. It should consider the scrutiny of appointments. If we are to continue to take powers from the House and give them to unelected quangos, the eyes and ears of the House should examine appointments before they are made. It has been alleged that appointments are becoming increasingly political. Whichever party is in office, I do not believe that political appointments are good for the democratic process.

Select Committees should review how this place and the Executive evolve. The report that we are now debating is some five years old, which shows the need to ensure that Select Committees are up to date, are in tune with current thinking and are fully scrutinising the Executive. The terms of reference of the next review should not be as wide as those for the 1989-90 report, which stated that the system was evolutionary and should be monitored from time to time to ensure that it was working well.

I apologise for the fact that, because I promised to meet some people at half-past six, I may not be here for the Minister's winding-up speech.

5.51 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), not only because I agreed with much of what he said but because it gives me the opportunity to say that he has been a wise, sensible and thoughtful Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. I was delighted to serve under him—and long may I do so.

A great consensus is growing in this Chamber. I am in considerable agreement with everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said, except for one point, which I shall deal with shortly.

Last week, Madam Speaker uttered a little homily on the way in which questions should be expressed to the Prime Minister. Obviously, she recognised that, over the years, Prime Minister's Question Time has descended into a pantomime farce. She referred to the proper way in which to obtain information from the Government—which I fear was the triumph of hope over experience.

For years, Question Time has not extracted a scintilla of information from the Government, whichever party has been in office. As a humble Minister, I found it the easiest thing in the world to avoid giving any revealing answers at Question Time. If the Government wanted to publicise something, the written parliamentary answer was a useful medium.

The adversarial atmosphere of the Chamber bears little relevance to the search for information. There may have been a time many years ago when Question Time and debates afforded some scrutiny of the Executive, but that was when there were fewer and more independent Members, and much looser party ties. Alas, the Chamber has become more and more show business and a source of copy for local press and media.

We should consider the Select Committee system in that context. In 1979, I had some doubts when Select Committees were introduced by Lord St. John of Fawsley. I was impressed by the romantic view of the Chamber held by Enoch Powell, Michael Foot and, I believe, Lord Whitelaw. Having served on three Select Committees, I am convinced that they are the only way forward in terms of scrutiny and restraining the increasingly all-powerful Executive.

Select Committees have done something to arrest the decline in the public's esteem for Parliament. I sat on the Broadcasting Select Committee, which saw through the introduction of television into Parliament. As I pointed out to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, that Committee wisely insisted that the media were not only to concentrate on Prime Minister's Question Time and idiotic occurrences in the Chamber but to give a broad picture of the House and to broadcast Select Committees.

[Sir Anthony Grant]

I have been struck by public's comments about Select Committees. They said, "In the Chamber, you looked exactly as we expected you to look when we heard you yelling and bawling on radio." But they were amazed and impressed by Select Committees, saying that they had never thought that hon. Members could behave so well and so sensibly. They had not realised that hon. Members could call to account Ministers, civil servants and bureaucrats in Select Committees, which is not possible in the Chamber.

That was a distinct plus for the Select Committee system and for Parliament. We must consider Parliament as a whole and do our best to raise our esteem in the eyes of the public.

One can take two views of Select Committees: first, that they are a useful means of keeping restless or idle Members out of mischief and harm's way—that is probably the establishment view—and, secondly, the better view, that they are the only means under our constitution of properly scrutinising the Executive.

If that system is to be improved and built on, a few suggestions should be borne in mind, some of which have already been referred to. First, more powers should be available to Select Committees.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central referred to our great work—it was three months' hard labour as far as I was concerned—on the pit closure report. We conducted the most vigorous internal debates before we agreed on the final report. Good God, we went away for drinks, came back and got in a huddle. It was 11 o'clock at night, after all-day activity, before we came finally to the virtually unanimous conclusion. As the hon. Member said, that is a valuable aspect of Select Committee work.

If Select Committees are to continue to develop, they must be properly supported. I contrast our system with the back-up system in the United States of America. I agree that we should not copy the United States system, but the back-up there is substantially greater.

I agree that the question of the Clerks must be considered. With respect to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), I am slightly more impressed by the arguments of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) than by his. Clerks are often overworked, particularly on overseas visits, where they have a tremendous amount of work.

I believe that there is too much cheeseparing—this is typically British—or spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar. It is important that members of Select Committees should go abroad. We should not have to worry about the media complaining about it—they travel abroad at the drop of a hat, and do so first class on Concorde, with huge expense accounts. We need to ensure that the job is done properly. If the job is worth doing, it is worth doing well, which means looking carefully at the back-up provided.

Secondly, the House should have adequate time to consider reports. It simply will not do to undertake work in immense detail, with Clerks, experts and Members of Parliament sitting all hours only for a report tamely to run into the sand. The procedure should be reformed, although I do not know how it should be carried out. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will pursue the matter to ensure that we can insist that Select Committee reports get proper and adequate consideration on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does my hon. Friend agree that the real difficulty is that, the more effective a Select Committee report is, especially if the Committee has analysed and scrutinised matters such as Government expenditure programmes, the less welcome it is to the Executive? There is a real difficulty in ensuring that the reports that most need to be debated are given time. We could end up with many debates on the innocuous reports and no time for debates on the difficult ones.

Sir Anthony Grant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I shall say a word or two about that in a moment.

Sir Peter Emery: Our hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) is not right. The decision on what should be debated is left to the Liaison Committee. An application is made to the Liaison Committee, which then decides, once the time is allocated, which reports will be debated. It is nothing to do with whether the Government wish to restrict time on a report. It is right to have that clearly understood.

Sir Anthony Grant: In that case, I shall direct my remarks away from the Treasury Bench and entirely to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who I hope will consider carefully the need to give adequate time to our reports.

Thirdly, the Committees should be properly constructed. They should be drawn from a broad base of knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. I believe that too many hon. Members are excluded. Perhaps too many Front-Bench Members are excluded; that is for the Opposition to say. There may be too many Front-Bench Members. Too many people may be involved in party committees who do not seem to qualify.

I believe that there are far too many Parliamentary Private Secretaries. We seemed to get on perfectly well with half the number when I first came into the House, but we are now knee-deep in them. If we had fewer, they would be able to perform a useful function on Select Committees; many of them are excellent people.

I now come to the one point on which I differ slightly from my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing—the chairmanship, which is always a difficulty. A case could be made for the senior Member to take the Chair, as happens in the United States. That should not, of course, happen if he is ga-ga. We can all point to examples of that.

Sir Peter Emery: Is my hon. Friend looking at himself?

Sir Anthony Grant: I was not looking at anyone except you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In normal circumstances, there is a case to be made for the senior Member taking the Chair. That would avoid a great deal of party chicanery, bickering and ill-feeling.

Above all—here I come to the most important point, which has already been stressed—there should be the minimum of interference in the work of Select Committees by the Government or by the Opposition establishment through the usual channels. Other hon. Members have referred to Enoch Powell. He said that the usual channels and the Whips Offices performed the same functions as sewers; they are essential. However, the activities of the usual channels should be kept as far away as possible from Select Committees.

There are many Select Committees apart from departmental ones. The members of those Committees are directly appointed by the Executive. There is the Select

Committee on Procedure, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), whom the Government wisely chose. There are the Select Committees on Members' Interests, on Privilege and on Administration. There are a range of Committees in which the Government have a very direct say, so the less say they have in the setting up of the departmental Select Committees, the better.

I cite two examples, which have probably been referred to, of bad interference by the Executive during this Parliament. At the start of this Parliament, there was deplorable confusion, and there was a conspiracy over chairmanships. That caused great annoyance to hon. Members on both sides and to me; many people were very irritated. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing said, a rather spurious doctrine was enunciated about the length of time people could serve as Chairmen. It was a tiresome and tedious time, and what happened was wrong.

The second example which happened this year—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) will know about this—was the blocking of a visit by the Trade and Industry Select Committee to South Africa. We were doing a report on trade with South Africa, and it was ludicrous to suppose that we could conclude our report without actually going to the new South Africa. The visit was blocked by the Opposition establishment during the non-co-operation war.

That was absolutely wrong. Party political rows between Front-Bench Members or anyone else in the Chamber should not block the work that Select Committees need to do to produce their reports. We should be ever vigilant to ensure that such incidents are not allowed to happen again.

All who believe, as I do, in parliamentary democracy, and who believe that it is fundamental not only to our constitution, but to our freedom, should unite and be determined to enhance and strengthen the Select Committee system—which is undoubtedly here to stay.

6.5 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cambridge, South-West (Sir A. Grant). I agree with almost all his comments. I certainly agree with his comment about the all-party nature of the Select Committees; I have found that to be a tremendous strength.

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee was the only Committee in the previous Parliament which did not have a Government majority. In this Parliament, the Government have been unable to ensure that every member of the Committee represents a Welsh constituency. If the choice was between retaining the Committee and abolishing it, we would be willing to pay that price. I am in the 11th year of my chairmanship of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. I am therefore especially pleased that I am an Opposition rather than a Conservative Member in terms of security of tenure.

I intend to make a few points about the role of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. I appreciate that its features are not common to all the Select Committees. The post of the Secretary of State for Wales encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, although it does not include the major responsibilities of defence, foreign affairs and the police.

The first thing that we try to do is to involve as many people as possible in giving written evidence. The gap between power and people can become wide. We believe that it is important that as many individuals and groups as possible feel that what they have to say about their experience will be listened to by the Select Committee.

Our next inquiry will be into the rehabilitation of those with serious head injuries. National organisations such as Headway—the National Head Injuries Association—and the Carers National Association will, of course, give evidence, as will the Department of Health, the Welsh Office and other significant players in the field. However, it is important that individuals who have gone through the trauma of, for example, being involved in a serious motorway car accident, being taken to a trauma unit and taking many years to recover from that horrible experience —and their families—can write to the Select Committee to say what their experience has been. They will be able to feel that they are participating.

I find such participation especially valuable when we take oral evidence in the Principality, which we do as often as we can. When, for example, the sea wall at Towyn broke and many hundreds of families were made homeless, it was a superb experience to be able to take evidence in Towyn so that the people who had been affected could see what we were doing in taking evidence and then publishing our report, after which the Government would publish their response.

Secondly, certainly in a Select Committee of our kind, the micro-level of analysis is especially significant. From my experience, it is easy for a Government Department, with its army of civil servants, to be able to duck and dive, and weave all kinds of cul-de-sacs for Select Committees to go down. However, if that Select Committee is operating at the micro-level, it is virtually impossible for the Government to follow it down the path that it takes. I shall give a couple of examples.

In 1983, the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office issued waste management paper No. 25 on clinical waste incineration. That document was in existence until 1990, when the Welsh Affairs Select Committee looked at toxic waste disposal in Wales. We discovered that the health authorities were not especially quick in responding to requests for information on their incinerators, so the Committee sent them a questionnaire to attain information on every clinical waste incinerator in the Principality, including questions on what the temperature was to be in the main burner and in the after-burner, what scrubbing facilities they had and so on.

When we then asked the health authorities—every one of them—to appear before us in the House and they came, we were amazed to discover in January 1990 that only three of them had ever heard of waste management paper No. 25. Indeed, those three had only discovered its existence two weeks previously, when we had asked them to come up here and pay us a visit. We asked the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment what had happened, to be told that, unfortunately, the document had not been issued to the relevant pollution bodies in England or in Wales—the health authorities at that time—but had been sent to every district authority in England and Wales, which had no responsibility whatever for that form of air pollution.

The response was wonderful. Of course, it was not from the Secretary of State for Wales. He delegated that responsibility to a clerk in the Welsh Office. When the

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letter came back—it was published, of course, as an appendix to our report—it contained a wonderful sentence, referring to why the wrongful issuing had occurred, along the lines that, with the given level of hindsight, it was impossible to know what went wrong, but it was reissuing waste management paper No. 25 and that this time it was being sent to the bodies in England and Wales which were responsible for monitoring the emissions from clinical hospital waste incineration. Only at that micro-level of considering every incinerator were we able to identify such a matter.

The second example is to do with local authorities and their relationship with the Welsh Office over rural housing in Wales. We decided to ask every local authority for information on the number of houses that had been given planning permission in the open countryside in Wales which were departures from and contrary to local and county structure plans and Welsh Office planning policy guidelines.

We were so shocked by the results of the questionnaire that we looked back a few years before that date and followed up what had been happening with six of those authorities. We found that hundreds of houses in the Welsh countryside had been given planning permission contrary to Welsh Office guidance and the respective county structure plans. When we asked the Welsh Office about that, it found it rather astonishing and representatives from various councils were summoned to London to meet the Under-Secretary of State at the Welsh Office to try to explain why particular houses had been given permission against the structure plan. The experience in north Cornwall was certainly salutary because it came at the right time.

When the Select Committee pays visits, certainly in the Principality, I have found it worth while never to tell the people whose premises we are looking at that we are coming. Whereas advance notice is convenient for them, it is especially inconvenient for us because it enables what we want to see to be easily concealed. I shall never forget the time that one of Her Majesty's inspectors of pollution started to come round Wales with us when we looked at landfill sites in the Principality. We were astonished to find that those sites could have been pleasure camps for any recreational form of sport or whatever, so clean were they, so seagull-free and without a whiff of any odour of any kind. However, when we decided to ask the inspector to return home and we continued our journey without visiting the sites which had been planned, the story was rather different. Therefore, it is well worth while not to turn up when the red carpet is laid out, but to turn up unannounced and see what is really going on.

The fourth rule of Select Committees is about informing people of what is available to them when we consider particular topics. We astonished the people of Wales when we considered treatment centres. They do not exist in England, but are unique national health service facilities in the Principality. If any person has been waiting for more than four months for in-patient surgery on cataracts, major joints, or hernias and varicose veins, they may be admitted not only to their local hospital, but to one of the treatment centres, which provide a marvellous facility for elective surgery. We were able to educate and train doctors because they seemed to be especially slow in knowing about the existence of the centres and, therefore, patients were being denied access to them.

Fifthly, Select Committees are useful as a method of educating hon. Members who serve on them. We have no in-training facilities in the House, no retraining facilities, and no way in which to keep us up to date, in detail, of what is going on. We tend to be cocooned in this establishment and the usual channels try to keep us here as long as possible. It is no disgrace at all to admit that it is of enormous benefit for those of us who serve on Select Committees to be aware in depth of what is going on in the subject areas which we consider.

Sixthly, it is important that Select Committees pay more attention to Government responses. It is fine to spend months looking in detail at a topic, to feel some sort of enormous relief to reach the end of an inquiry, to have written the report, for—one hopes—unanimous agreement to have been reached, for the report to be dispatched and to be waiting for the Government to respond. Then the response is filed and no more is heard on the issue until we want to examine it again. It would be useful for the Select Committee to examine the Government on that response. The Minister could be asked back to the Committee and questioned in detail on why this or that recommendation was not accepted. That could be a way forward.

Lastly—I do not think that the Leader of the House is in a position to accept this readily—in terms of open government, it would be rather nice if Select Committees could spend the occasional day or, pushing it, the occasional week, nosing around the Departments that they monitor. The Welsh Select Committee could spend a week in the Welsh Office in Cardiff. Members of the Committee could roam round the Department finding out how it works at first hand and prodding here and there into files to see what is the ambience of the Department.

I get the impression that Governments are not too happy when a Select Committee starts walking around the Department that it is supposed to monitor. Although it may be a little early for the Leader of the House to make such a decision, I would certainly welcome an arrangement whereby we could enter the hallowed places of knowledge to mix with civil servants without some watchful eye behind us ensuring that we do not talk to the wrong person in case we find out things that are a little embarrassing for us to know.

With those few comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to make this speech. The Select Committee system is superb. Without it, I would have long left this place because, as many hon. Members who have spoken before me have said, it gets rid of the adversarial element and allows us to look objectively as best we can at the evidence before us and constructively to move the debate forward. We do so in the hope that, if the Government accept some of our constructive recommendations, the quality of life and the decisions of the Government will be improved for the benefit of us all.

6.21 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The debate has enabled us to pause, even for just two and a half hours, and take stock of the achievements of the departmental Select Committee system and to assess its value to good government and

parliamentary activity. It has allowed us to assess the extent to which it commands the interest and, to a greater degree, the confidence of the public.

Perhaps the most obvious advantage of the Select Committee system has been manifest today. The House is at its best, it is always said, when we are not too adversarial, everyone agrees with everyone else and, if disagreement forces itself upon us, we respond only in the most civilised and well-mannered way. As a result, I am sure that this debate will not feature on either the 9 o'clock or the 10 o'clock news later today.

I was a member of the old-style Select Committee, which was all things to all Departments. I was on the sub-committee of the Social Services and Employment Sub-Committee of the Expenditure Committee under the leadership of Mrs. Renee Short. In one period, we reported on preventive medicine, juvenile crime and unemployment. As hon. Members will realise, that spread our expertise so wide as probably to be of little use to anyone. I am sure that the departmental Select Committee system that we have now is a decided improvement on that.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who is a most worthy, diligent and effective Chairman of the Liaison Committee and Select Committee Chairman, that the record of departmental Select Committees is considerable and well justifies their creation. I agree that they hold Ministers to account effectively and that they keep civil servants on their toes. A civil servant never knows when he or she might be called to account personally for his or her work.

Select Committees inform Parliament of the important evidence available on subjects of current importance. The Home Affairs Select Committee has taken up raging issues such as legal aid and violence on video at the very moment when they have raged. As the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), the Chairman of the Welsh Select Committee, said, the Select Committees ensure that we become experts and therefore much more able to make the work that we do in Parliament credible.

Lastly, Select Committees come to conclusions which influence Government, as I hope that the Home Affairs Select report published this week on racial attacks and harassment will do before the Government conclude the proceedings on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill.

I would go further and suggest that in the public eye, now that television is with us and has highlighted the knockabout of politics, the Select Committee system may be seen as one of the saving graces of Parliament itself. The public, who might otherwise be led to believe that this place is a madhouse of shouting, ranting, cantankerous, unobjective noisemongers, can see that Parliament is much more than that. I understand from the television operators that there is a surprisingly high level of viewing of programmes based on Select Committee activity. In short, the Select Committees have raised the standard of Parliament higher in the estimation of the people we represent. That is a thoroughly good thing.

To go even further, in a world in which nations are emerging into the daylight of democracy, the example of this Parliament, both good and bad, may have some effect in influencing the structure of new parliamentary democracies and in helping to reform democracies of longer standing. My American friends tell me that they sit glued to their armchairs with their popcorn while they watch what happens in this place, not only at Prime Minister's Question Time. Certainly, the departmental Select Committees have been the subject of great interest among visiting democratic Parliaments as they have emerged from communism or wherever. That is another source of pride for the system.

I shall not take up the time of the House by commenting on the procedural points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and other colleagues, save to say that I agree with most of them and that the strengthening that has been called for is likely to improve the working of the system even further. However, I would add that there are some rather silly rules that we could well get rid of, particularly those relating to broadcasting.

Last week, the Home Affairs Select Committee visited the offices of the British Board of Film Classification. The hon. Member for Gower will note that we go out into the hallowed precincts of agencies and Government Departments. While we were there, we discovered that although the proceedings were public, they could not be televised because there was only one instead of two cameras in a fixed position. That afternoon we held a press conference upstairs here in the House. It could not be televised even in a room with two fixed cameras approved for the televising of the proceedings of Parliament because it was not a formal meeting of the Committee. I hope that common sense will prevail in such matters when the procedures come to be reviewed, as they are clearly absurd.

I wish to raise one other matter which I hope will be considered for the future. It is a matter of some substance and importance and would take our Select Committee system into a completely new area. One of the agencies with which the Home Affairs Select Committee has dealt is the Law Commission. One of the tasks of that august body under a series of distinguished judicial figures and latterly under the guidance of Mr. Justice Brooke has been to reform the criminal law.

Almost everyone agrees that what would most reform the criminal law is the creation of a code of criminal law. However, that is light years away under our present system. There is simply no machinery for dealing comprehensively with a large subject such as the codification of the entire criminal law because there is no time in the parliamentary year to deal with it, even though much of what would be agreed by a commission and then fed into what I postulate might be a new Select Committee would be entirely non-contentious.

If we do not have such a system, one problem is the frustration that is engendered. The inadequacy of Parliament may lead the Commission to recommend the taking of policy decisions, or inspire the judges to take policy decisions, which they did recently in deciding against Parliament—although they seem to have forgotten that that was so—on the introduction of a crime of marital rape. Public policy decisions are for Parliament; they are not for academics, agencies and judges.

I ask the Procedure Committee and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to consider whether we might devise a Select Committee, perhaps of both Houses of Parliament, whose function was solely to reform the criminal law—to do it steadily and relentlessly over a period, calling witnesses, arguing the issues and coming to conclusions which are reasonable, sensible and acceptable to all those involved in the administration of the criminal law.

Of course, it would be necessary—here is the rub—to bypass the Chamber on all issues except those which raise questions of public and political principle and policy. The

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age of consent, the question whether there should be an offence of marital rape, the age of criminal responsibility, the question whether the sentence for murder should be mandatory or discretionary and a whole string of other similar issues would be a matter for this Chamber, and this Chamber alone, but most of the matters that would be included in a criminal code would be non-contentious matters which Parliament, through either the House of Lords or the House of Commons, or both together in a Select Committee, could agree. That would reflect adequately and properly the needs of society.

If we could devise such an additional Select Committee system, we might be able to make progress on criminal law reform in general and on a code of criminal law in particular. We could thus simplify, clarify, spread knowledge and understanding of, and speed the administration of the criminal law, and Parliament would have taken a big step towards improving the social fabric and order of our society. That is, after all, the main reason for our existence.

6.32 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I rise for the second time in about a week to talk about parliamentary reform. For the sake of those who heard my speech the first time round, I shall try not to duplicate the remarks that I made on that occasion. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). I spent much of Thursday eulogising, if not the hon. and learned Gentleman personally, the report on racial violence and racial harassment to which he referred. It is a superb report, although I wonder whether the Home Office will see it in such a good light.

Many of the reports produced by the House are the result of a great deal of research and wisdom. Regrettably, that wisdom is rarely transmitted to those at whom it is directed—that is, the Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) said, we spend a long time on a report, wait three months for an anodyne response and that is virtually the end of the matter. The report may circulate around the Department, never to resurface. If anything is acted on, it may be a little bit of a recommendation. Academics may pick it up, so it is regurgitated later.

I should like to see a serious study done, as was done by the old Expenditure Committee. I was interested to see that the Defence and External Affairs Sub-Committee of the Expenditure Committee did a detailed analysis of the recommendations that were made. What happened to those recommendations? Regrettably, much of the endeavour has totally dissipated. When one adds the amount of time that we put into researching and arguing a report, it seems to be an inadequate response.

Frankly, I am disappointed that we are debating a report that was published in the 1989-90 Session. It has taken a long time to debate the report; it is almost time for a new Procedure Committee. I am even more disappointed by the appalling response of Members of Parliament. I am pleased that there are some Committee Chairmen present, although I am disappointed that we do not have infinitely more. The Leader of the House can gleefully pass on to his colleagues the message that the troops are not really interested in parliamentary reform, so there is not much impetus. I hope, however, that he will seek almost self-generation in the matter and try to go down not only as the Leader of the House who was seriously interested in parliamentary reform but as the Leader of the House who sought and was successful in implementing a number of significant changes.

Regrettably, we are complacent about the way in which we operate. We pat one another on the back and say that the Select Committee system is basically satisfactory. The Government say in their report that they agree with the Procedure Committee that the

"system is basically sound and does not stand in need of major reform".

That is like asking the Italian mafia whether they are happy with the performance of the Italian police. Of course the Government will say that they are happy with the existing arrangements. They are the substantial beneficiaries of a Select Committee system which does not properly harness the abilities, competence and knowledge of hon. Members, for two basic reasons.

First, Members of Parliament do not seem to be all that enthused about procedural change; secondly, Ministers are delighted that having got over the worst in 1979, with the system being more or less imposed on them, it has not proceeded much further. I was desperately hoping that the report of the Procedure Committee would say something like this: "As the Select Committee system has been operating since 1979, we have had ample opportunity to analyse its successes and failures. We have now decided that, having conferred no power whatever on the Committee system, other than the power to send for persons and papers, the time has come to confer some significant powers on the Select Committee system". There is nothing at all about that in the report. If another Procedure Committee is set up, I wonder whether it would exude the same sense of self-satisfaction.

I very much admire what the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said. Indeed, I agreed with almost everything that he said. However, he exhibited a tendency of which we are all guilty—that of comparing the House of Commons with the United States Congress, which is an unfair comparison because the constitution of the United States conferred decision-making powers on Congress as part of the reaction to the reality of strongly centralised decision making in the United Kingdom. When we say that we cannot go too far down that road, of course we cannot. However, we do not often compare our parliamentary and Select Committee systems with similar parliamentary committees. It would seem that we do not compare at all favourably with the United States system.

We produce reports that are as good as any, but we have no power to legislate and we have no power in the Budget. What we have is a factory for manufacturing reports which are often completely ignored. We say that there should be a bridge between reports and debate, but there is hardly any bridge at all. The Government said that they do not want to give more time for such debates. Of course they do not. I find the whole thing profoundly unsatisfactory.

We have influence only in the Select Committees. Occasionally, we are able to move, change and reverse policy. Often, when a report comes out, there may be no other news and the Government are forced on to the defensive—there are instances where that has happened. The media may concentrate on one report and the Government may be embarrassed into taking action.

I recall a report with which the Defence Select Committee was involved in the early 1980s regarding the physical security of military installations. It was an important report, because a Standing Committee on privatising the royal ordnance factories was proceeding parallel with the Select Committee inquiry into physical security in military installations. The Government intended to privatise security, kick out the Ministry of Defence police and bring in a contract security firm.

I was a member of both the Select Committee and the Standing Committee, and by the time we reached clause 27 of the Bill the Defence Select Committee had totally destroyed the Government's argument. Everyone on the Committee was happy that the Government relented. That was one of the few triumphs for the Standing Committee system. In reality, an inquiry by the Select Committee resulted in the change and it was accelerated by the fact that when our report came out there was no other news. The Government were therefore forced into a corner and they climbed down.

There are two lessons there. We should not need to rely on the fortunate absence of other publicity and the process of legislation should be linked with the process of investigation. The Procedure Committee report recommended that greater attention be given to Standing Committees and that in Session 1990-91 there should be more Special Standing Committees, but nothing whatever came of that.

Looking at the Government's response—the paper is yellow with age and fraying at the corners—I agree that there should be more emphasis on broad expenditure priorities. The trouble is that we tend to be more interested in high policy than in the boring minutiae of the budgetary process. In that sense, some of the blame lies with ourselves.

The Government said that there would be no sub-Committees because the Procedure Committee did not want them, but I see sub-Committees as a means of increasing one's output by putting more pressure on the Government on a variety of fronts. The Government do not want that to happen.

On special advisers, the Government and the Clerk of the House said that they did not want

"a standing army of Parliamentary experts".

The use of the words "standing army" is clearly abusive. I believe that a Select Committee backed by professional expertise is the best way to proceed. If there is not animosity between the Clerk and the advisers, there is some turf protection and I can understand why the Clerk does not always want to see too many advisers.

We should have more power to increase staffing levels, and I agree that we should do more to link with the Library. We have a marvellous Library with marvellous staff, but I would ask anyone who gets too carried away to go to the congressional research service and see the extent of research there. No one can dispute that it is a different political system, but I believe that the quality and extent of research being done for congress members by the congressional research service is such that we should seek to bridge the gap between it and our system.

On allowances and facilities for entertainment, the Defence Committee had a visit from a Nordic defence committee a few years ago and its members dragged out of us our entire allowance. They could not speak a word of English, but they knew all the brands of whisky and other drinks and we were destitute as a result. It is a good idea to entertain modestly, but we can hardly be described as the last of the great spenders.

In conclusion, we should have appropriate powers as we often have to deal with labyrinthine bureaucracies. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower talked about nosing around Departments. He may find the task of nosing around the Welsh Office difficult, but I suspect that nosing around the Ministry of Defence would result in immediate incarceration. As a Back-Bench Member, I sought an unclassified briefing from a middle-ranking civil servant in the MoD. The meeting was arranged, but it was vetoed because a Back Bencher could not get into the MoD to talk to a middle-ranking civil servant. The bunker in the MoD is not under it—it extends up to the brain: it is an Ottoman approach to decision-making and we are not the beneficiaries of it.

6.44 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) makes a powerful case for the rights of Select Committees, and in particular for the right of Select Committees to eat into time on the Floor of the House. He makes that case in an effective and unique way.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) —unusually for him—opened the debate on a note of controversy. He said that the setting up of the Select Committees may turn out to be Baroness Thatcher's lasting monument, and something for which she will be enduringly remembered. I dare him to go and tell her that. I do not think that that would be her perception of the 1980s, but the right hon. Gentleman is a brave man and I wish him well.

The core issue—all speeches have drawn this out—is the balance of power between the Executive and Parliament. Speaking from memory, I do not think that Baroness Thatcher was always to be found on the libertarian side of that argument. Perhaps for the right hon. Member for Worthing, history and the passage of time lend enchantment.

The purpose of Select Committees is to underpin Parliament's right to scrutinise, investigate and influence the work of the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) spoke about effective control and stewardship over Ministers. He also spoke about Select Committees being the eyes and ears of the House over Departments. The conclusion from the Procedure Committee's report was that, in general, the Select Committee system is essentially sound and not in need of major reform. I accept that, but there are a number of issues arising from the report which deserve further consideration.

The broad conclusion of the Procedure Committee is right, and I thank the Committee for its review. I do not mean it unkindly when I say that the debate is timely. I know that the report came out in 1989-90, but nevertheless the debate is timely because, as the House will know, a number of matters concerning the reform of parliamentary procedure are under consideration. The report usefully informs future debate and will act as a benchmark. The fact that it does not propose any substantial change does not detract from its value, nor from its thoroughness. The

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Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), fairly observed that it is a comprehensive piece of work.

Among the important issues raised are the relationship between Select Committee reports and the Floor of the House, and the role for departmental Select Committees in scrutinising departmental expenditure, including scrutiny of executive agencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North pointed out that three quarters of all civil servants now work for agencies, rather than directly for Departments.

The Procedure Committee report comments on the giving of evidence. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) referred to the scrutiny of appointments and my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) mentioned the scrutiny of the Government's responses to individual Select Committee reports.

The other key issues to emerge from the Procedure Committee report include the points made about the role of the National Audit Office, and the relationship between the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee on the one hand and departmental Select Committees on the other. A very important recommendation by the Procedure Committee —I intervened in the speech of the right hon. Member for Honiton regarding the matter—was about the use of Special Standing Committees.

Time is short, so I can only refer to one or two points rather than doing the debate justice. I can see clearly that it is frustrating for departmental Select Committees to produce reports which do not get a chance to be considered on the Floor of the House. I understand the pressures of time on the Government—any Government, and not just this Conservative one—but we should try to find a middle way. If the suggestion of using estimates days is flawed, we should try to find some other way to ensure that the work of Select Committees is reflected in debate here on the Floor of the House. Not everything will be debated, but something should. In the current discussions, we can at least examine that issue again and see if something can be done.

Another continuing theme in the debate has been the extent to which departmental Committees should involve themselves in scrutinising departmental expenditure. The Conservative party's view on that seems to have changed, because at one time it was very enthusiastic about it. Each year, Departments produce a document that sets out their spending plans. We used to have a whole day's debate on those plans, but the last one was in May 1991 and it has now slipped out of the parliamentary calendar. We cannot even get an assurance from the Leader of the House that that debate will be restored to us this year. It is right that Parliament should take seriously its responsibility for scrutinising public expenditure, and the Select Committees have a role to play in that.

The establishment of Special Standing Committees is an important suggestion. Some Bills occur every year, the Finance Bill being an obvious example, and they contain controversial and less controversial measures. There is an overwhelming case for a taxes management Bill, which could be dealt with by a Special Standing Committee to which experts with specialist knowledge could give evidence. Such a Bill would consider matters that do not tend to be the subject of controversy between the parties. Those relating to anti-avoidance represent a shared objective between the Opposition and the Government, although one would not necessarily think so when one considers how they are dealt with in the Finance Bill. It would be far better for us to listen to the specialist evidence from the Inland Revenue, the Institute of Taxation and others and then make considered recommendations.

Sir Peter Emery: Get it right the first time.

Mr. Brown: Exactly so.

I know that accepting such a proposal would mean a longer gap between the Second Reading of the Finance Bill and its formal Committee stage, but the Opposition would be willing to agree to a timetable on a taxes management Bill. That would mean that the less controversial matters, once considered in the Finance Bill, could be dealt with in a measured and orderly way. Everyone in the outside world, as well as parliamentarians, would know on which day specific rafts of clauses would be dealt with and that consideration would be undertaken in a mature and considered manner. If the drafting was defective—that is a problem for Ministers—it would be exposed through the Special Standing Committee procedure and the relevant changes would have to be made. That could be achieved with all-party agreement, rather than in an adversarial manner.

There will always be rows between the parties on the main issues contained in the Finance Bill, because whether to raise or lower taxes is a controversial matter. That should be fought out when considering a truncated Finance Bill in Committee or on the Floor of the House, which is where we consider the main tax proposals anyway.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) referred to the work of the Law Commission, which considers similar complex issues. There is a clear case for establishing Special Standing Committees to consider specialist, complex legislation. I urge the House and, in particular, the Leader of the House to consider it.

The hon. Member for Cambridge, South-West (Sir A. Grant) said that in the past 15 years there had been a shift in the balance of power from Parliament to the Executive. I believe that that is apparent even within the Executive, with a further concentration of power in the hands of the office of the Prime Minister and the closest advisers to that individual. Almost imperceptibly, British government is becoming increasingly presidential. There are many reasons for that, not least government by a single party since 1979. We have to accept our share of the blame for that.

If parliamentary democracy is to work and command respect, we must assert Parliament's rights as enthusiastically as the Executive asserts its own. The case for the reform of parliamentary procedures, by consent, is overwhelming. The case for Select Committees will have been reaffirmed by today's useful debate.

6.53 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): This has been a most interesting debate. The first thing I should do in what will perforce be a fairly brief contribution is to thank and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) on pressing for this debate—I was happy to accede to his request—and on the way in which he introduced it. I should like to thank and

congratulate all the hon. Members who have taken part, because we have had a genuinely constructive debate, even if it is not the kind which reaches definitive conclusions. A number of issues have been raised and I undertake to reflect on them.

I have had the privilege to be Leader of the House for just over two years and I hope that I can at least claim that my support of Select Committees and my desire to ensure that they work as well as possible has been reasonably demonstrated. Despite the observations from one or two people on the occasional delay in setting up Committees, we have not done too badly in this Parliament. I have checked up on the dates and I can tell the House that the new Parliament met for the Queen's Speech on 6 May—it had met earlier for swearing in and the like—and we had set up the Select Committees in a mere two months on 13 July.

That was done against a background in which I was told almost daily by the representatives of the newspapers that they did not believe that we would get the Select Committees set up by the summer recess. That achievement was a demonstration not just of my support, but of the Government's support for Select Committees, as is our acceptance of the great majority of the recommendations of the Procedure Committee, together with the recent establishment of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland.

I will say no more, and I say it quite unequivocally, than that I am a strong supporter of Select Committees for precisely the reasons that have been echoed during the debate—the improved scrutiny of the Executive, the scope that they provide for constructive consensus across party boundaries on a number of issues and their real and constructive influence. I would not be as dismissive or as pessimistic about them as the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) was. Those Committees have exercised that constructive influence on a number of important issues, not least those with which I was concerned for many years as a Minister with responsibility for health and social security.

The debate has highlighted a number of important issues for consideration by the members of the Select Committees themselves, as right hon. and hon. Members have generously acknowledged today, and by the Liaison or Procedure Committee. I am sure that the Chairmen of those Committees have taken careful note of the suggestions made.

The unanimous theme expressed during the debate—it is always one of the most popular themes in Parliament —has been to bash the Whips. One or two Whips are present and no doubt they feel duly chastened. They will take note of what was said. The proposals concerning the membership of Select Committees, which drew some criticism from hon. Members on both sides of the House, were made by the Committee of Selection. I am sure that the Chairman of that Committee will take note of what has been said, as will those who were castigated over the difficulties that arose from visits abroad or the absence of such visits during the period when the usual channels were not operated by those in the Opposition. I do not want to be drawn further into that potentially contentious matter in the circumstances of this brief speech.

A number of points raised are in the hands of Committees and their members, including those made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) about the work rate. Other hon. Members spoke about the scrutiny of spending plans. Many Select Committees consider their Departments' spending plans and there is nothing to stop them doing so. There is nothing to stop them looking at the work of executive agencies and calling for evidence from the heads of those agencies. There is certainly nothing to stop them doing more to follow up their reports, as hon. Members have urged them to do today.

The debate has highlighted tensions, which I so often see in my role as Leader of the House, between the conflicting demands made from different quarters. Against the repeated desire of hon. Members for as little interference from the Whips as possible, to use their terminology, must be set the tension created by the suggestion for enhancing the powers of Select Committees to act directly without seeking a resolution from the House.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) also suggested that the recommendations of Select Committees should automatically be put to the vote in the House. If those suggestions were put into effect they would, almost inevitably, enhance the interest that the Whips would feel they would have to take in Select Committees. I put that as gently as I can, but it is the likely effect. I believe that the House would be right to be cautious before adopting some of the proposals made in the debate.

The Chairmen of the Procedure and Liaison Committees must accept that there is an obvious tension between the persistent demands for progress on the Jopling report—with which they sometimes associate themselves —and the demands for more and more time to debate the reports of Select Committees. Perhaps those tensions can be resolved, but they certainly exist. They come alongside many of the other difficult points which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and I are trying to tease out in our on-going discussions, which will also take account of some of the points that have been made about our economic debates.

I have little time in which to comment on the specific proposals that have been made. The Procedure Committee may care to look further at some of them, including video conferencing and the points about the European Legislation Committees. It is for my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and his Committee to decide whether they wish to undertake further examination. I hope that we shall all reflect on the useful points that have been made in this debate. I conclude my remarks simply by saying that, in line with the spirit in which I have approached the establishment of Select Committees, their work and this debate, my response will be constructive.

Appropriation (Northern Ireland)

7 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 25th May, be approved.

The draft order, which covers the main estimates for Northern Ireland Departments, authorises expenditure of £3,291 million for the current financial year. Taken together with the sum voted on account in March, this brings total estimates provision for Northern Ireland Departments to £5,824 million, an increase of 4.1 per cent. on 1993-94 provisional outturn.

The sums sought for individual services are set out in the estimates booklet, which is, as usual, available from the Vote Office. I remind the House that the estimates for the Northern Ireland Office for law and order services are not covered by the order before us tonight.

As is customary on these occasions, I shall highlight the main items in the estimates, starting with the Department of Agriculture. The net provision in the two agriculture votes amounts to some £164 million. In vote 1, some £25 million is to fund EC and national agriculture and fishery support measures that apply throughout the United Kingdom. In addition to the various pre-funded market support measures under the common agricultural policy, the vote includes some £10 million to assist structural improvements, by way of various capital and other grants; £14 million is to provide support for farming in special areas, by means of headage payments for hill cattle and sheep.

In vote 2, some £139 million is for on-going regional services and support measures. That includes £59 million for the development of the agriculture and agricultural products industries and for scientific and veterinary services; £44 million is for farm support, enhancement of the countryside, fisheries and forestry services; £22 million is for central administration; and £5 million is for the rural development programme, an increase of £3 million over 1993-94.

In the Department of Economic Development's vote 1, £130 million is required for the Industrial Development Board. That will enable the board to carry out its role of strengthening Northern Ireland's industrial base and to meet its existing commitments, primarily in the area of selective assistance to industry.

The board's continuing success in attracting internationally competitive inward investment to Northern Ireland is very welcome. Thirteen projects were successfully negotiated last year, representing a total investment of £259 million, and 2,309 jobs were promoted, against a target of 2,250. The board hopes to build on those successes in the coming year.

In vote 2, some £94 million is required. Some £34 million is for the Local Enterprise Development Unit, Northern Ireland's small business agency. That will allow the agency to maintain its successful track record in developing, strengthening and improving the competitiveness of small firms in Northern Ireland.

Some £14 million is for the Industrial Research and Technology Unit, which seeks to improve the performance of local companies through increased innovation, research and development and by technology transfer. That underlines the importance which the Government attach to improving the competitiveness of business in Northern Ireland to enable it to meet the challenges of the international marketplace.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The House will be interested in the work of the Department of Economic Development, but when discussions take place, as I imagine they do annually, will my right hon. Friend try to balance the protection of jobs through that work in industry and making Northern Ireland's economy competitive, with the 35,000 farming jobs, of which 10,000 to 12,000 are full time? The average cost of agricultural support is £1,200 per farm, which is good value compared with the cost of agricultural support in the rest of the United Kingdom and with some of the economic development investments which the Government rightly make.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, as he brings to the House considerable knowledge of Northern Ireland, having been a distinguished Minister in the Province. I shall urge upon my hon. Friends, in their ministerial capacities, the necessity to heed his wise advice.

Finally in that vote, £12.5 million is for the Northern Ireland tourist board to assist the further development of tourism in Northern Ireland. In 1993, a record 1.26 million visitors came to Northern Ireland, the fifth consecutive year of growth in visitor numbers.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Is not that figure of 1.26 million visitors misleading, as most of them are people returning home or visiting relatives? Is it possible to know how many genuine tourists there were?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for early notice of that point. I pray that, before the conclusion of the debate, the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), will be able to comment authoritatively on the division of those statistics.

In vote 3—

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Will the Minister give way before he leaves the subject of the tourist board?

Sir John Wheeler: I shall not leave that subject if the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene on it.

Mr. Ross: Is it not of concern to the Minister that there now seems to be no member of the tourist board specifically concerned with the principal tourist area of Northern Ireland—the north coast? Why does not that area have a representative on the board at present?

Sir John Wheeler: Individuals appointed to the tourist board of Northern Ireland are appointed not on a geographical basis but on the premise that they will serve the interests of Northern Ireland as a whole. As there are many claimants to the work and services of the tourist board, I sure that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will feel that that is the wisest course of action.

In vote 3, some £204 million is for the Training and Employment Agency. That includes £53 million for the youth training programme, to support some 12,000 training places and on-going expenditure on a new training facility in west Belfast.

Some £53 million is for the action for community employment programme, to provide 9,500 places for long-term unemployed adults in projects of community benefit. Some £24 million is for the job training programme, which offers training and work experience to unemployed adults. That is £1.6 million more than in 1993-94, and will allow the programme to expand from 5,700 places in March 1994 to 6,000 by March 1995. Eighteen million pounds is to assist companies to improve their competitiveness by training and development of their employees.

Token provision of £1,000 in vote 4 is to cover residual expenses in connection with the privatisation of the Northern Ireland electricity supply industry. That is offset by further proceeds from the share sale. A supplementary estimate, covering actual expenses and proceeds from the sale, will be presented to the House in due course.

I now turn to the Department of the Environment. In vote 1, £183 million is for roads, transport and ports. That includes about £152 million for the development, operation and maintenance of Northern Ireland's public road system. An extensive programme of maintenance work on carriageways and bridges is under way, complemented by new road construction, and improvement schemes. Construction work on the Belfast cross-harbour road and rail links is well under way, with completion of the rail link and stage 1 of the road link expected by the end of the year.

Vote 2 covers housing, where about £188 million will provide assistance, mainly to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and to the voluntary housing movement.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Minister tell us what he has in mind for the dualling of the A8 and of the A26?

Sir John Wheeler: At this precise moment, I have nothing in mind, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State may have something in mind before the end of the debate.

When net borrowing and the Housing Executive's rents and capital receipts are taken into account, the total resources available for housing this year will be about £570 million. That is an increase of £14 million on 1993-94, and will support the continued improvement of housing conditions.

Vote 3 covers expenditure on water and sewerage services, where gross expenditure is estimated at £200 million. Ninety-three million pounds is for capital expenditure, and £107 million for operational and maintenance purposes.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene. What amount is set aside, in the capital expenditure to which he has referred, to continue the privatisation of the water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland?

Sir John Wheeler: My hon. Friend the Minister of State will seek to give the hon. Gentleman an authoritative answer on that. If not, I shall ensure that he has a written response as soon as possible.

In vote 4, £136 million is for environmental services. That includes about £34 million for urban regeneration measures, which continue to be targeted at areas of social, economic and environmental need. As in previous years, that will generate much greater overall investment through the successful partnerships that have been established with the private sector.

The estimates for the Department of Education seek a total of £1,317 million, an increase of 3.6 per cent. on last year's provision. Vote 1 includes £807 million for recurrent expenditure by education and library boards, an increase of £40 million on 1993-94. That includes £760 million for schools and colleges of further education, which should maintain the pupil-teacher ratio at present levels.

Forty-seven million pounds is for libraries, youth services and administration, and £40 million for boards' capital projects. That includes the provision of new laboratories and technology workshops to enable further progress to be made on education reforms. Some £133 million is for voluntary schools, and £11.5 million for integrated schools.

In vote 2, £109 million is for local universities to enable them to maintain parity of provision with comparable universities in the rest of the United Kingdom. One hundred and twenty-four million pounds is for student support, including grants and student loans. The vote also covers expenditure on a range of youth, sport, community and cultural activities, including about £17 million for arts and museums and about £3 million for community relations.

The next set of votes relates to the Department of Health and Social Services. In vote 1, about £1,293 million is for expenditure on hospital, community health, personal social services, health and social services trusts and family health services. That is an increase of 6.8 per cent. on last year.

In vote 3, gross provision of £206 million is for the Department's administration and other costs. That includes £116 million for the Social Security Agency, £14 million for the Child Support Agency, and £13 million for the health and personal social services management executive.

Some £1,302 million in vote 4 is for a range of social security benefits administered by the Social Security Agency. That represents an increase of 4.3 per cent. on last year. It covers not only the general uprating of benefits from April 1994, but an increasing number of beneficiaries.

In vote 5, £458 million is to cover expenditure on the independent living fund, housing benefit, the social fund and payments to the national insurance fund.

Finally, I turn to the Department of Finance and Personnel, where, in vote 3, about £4 million is for the community relations programme. That reflects the importance that Government continue to attach to community relations in Northern Ireland.

In my opening remarks, I have drawn attention to the main provisions of the estimates. I hope that, in replying to the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister of State will respond to the points that have already been raised with me, and any other points that hon. Members may raise during the debate.

I commend the order to the House.

7.18 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I thank the Minister for taking the House through the allocation of funds among the spending Departments in Northern Ireland. I do not intend to delay the House unduly this evening, because this is the opportunity for Members of Parliament from Northern

[Mr. Roger Stott]

Ireland to mention a wide range of concerns—which I am sure they will, judging from past debates. However, I shall discuss several issues.

The Minister talked about funding for transportation. I do not know whether he was in the House this afternoon when the Prime Minister presented a report on the European summit meeting in Corfu, but one of the items on the agenda was European transport integration. The Prime Minister mentioned the link between Dublin and Belfast. I thought that money had already been made available for the improvement and upgrading of that railway line. I should be grateful, as I am sure would everyone else, if the Minister would say, when he winds up, precisely what that means in terms of European funding for transportation infrastructure in the island of Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, as this is an important cross-party point. There are benefits in running a line across to Wales and then to Dublin, but it is worth emphasising to my hon. Friend the Minister that using the line up through Scotland to Larne will be of great advantage, not only for Northern Ireland, but for the northern part of the Republic of Ireland. In the European discussions, I hope that the needs of Scotland and Northern Ireland will not be overlooked, and that the Republic of Ireland will not gain all the benefits from the line to Wales.

Mr. Stott: As I said, it is my impression that an allocation of 50 million ecu has already been approved for the upgrading of the Dublin-Belfast railway line. As the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) will know, as a former Minister, Northern Ireland Railways is shortly to conclude work through Belfast to Larne, so that there will be a direct link from Dublin to Larne for people who want to travel that way, which is all to the good.

The Minister mentioned funding enterprise, and funding training. I hear what he has to say, and I make no apologies for the fact that I have previously raised the Government's record on unemployment in Northern Ireland. Overall unemployment continues to be a key concern in the local economy, and is of overriding importance to those people in Northern Ireland who are out of work or face the uncertainty of unemployment prospects.

The people of Northern Ireland continue to feel the full force of the Government's ineptitude, and are experiencing the highest rate of unemployment in any region in the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is about the size of a riding of south Yorkshire, and has a population of a little over 1 million. Unemployment in Northern Ireland is 13.1 per cent. of the total work force—an appalling level.

I genuinely welcome any decrease in the rate of unemployment, and I note that the figures for May show a slight fall in the level. But closer inspection and an accurate interpretation of those figures show that there is no room for complacency. Anyone who has read the "Northern Ireland Economic Review and Prospects" by Coopers and Lybrand will see that clearly.

More than half those registered as unemployed in the region are classified as long-term unemployed, and have been out of work for a year or more. While there has been an increase in the number of people in employment of about 2,200, which is to be welcomed, the increase is made up entirely of female part-time jobs.

I welcome the creation of a flexible job market which extends choice to workers whose life style and needs suit part-time employment, but more than one fifth of the region's unemployed have been out of work for more than five years. It is therefore self-evident that the creation of part-time posts has had no significant impact on the number of long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland. They are the people who seek genuine security for themselves and their families, and are attempting to shed their state dependence through secure full-time employment.

The number of employees in full-time employment in Northern Ireland fell by 3,290 between December 1992 and September 1993. Despite what he said, the Minister has this evening been unable to offer any new hope to the long-term unemployed in order to help them back into full-time employment.

On closer inspection of the most recent figures, we see that the most appalling statistics are revealed in the travel-to-work areas. Eight out of the 12 travel-to-work areas in Northern Ireland have unemployment of 18 per cent. or more. Strabane continues to suffer the highest unemployment, with more than one quarter of the work force in its travel-to-work area unemployed. Of the 566 Northern Ireland wards 107 have a male unemployment rate of more than 30 per cent.

Those statistics lead to the undeniable conclusion that the Government are simply not doing enough to get the unemployed of Northern Ireland back to work and to help give them a future. It is perhaps the youth unemployment rate that, above all, highlights the worst neglect of skills and potential among Northern Ireland's population. More than a quarter of those aged between 17 and 24 are unemployed. What hope does the Minister bring to the Dispatch Box for them this evening?

Wherever young people live in the United Kingdom, their unemployment leads to widespread poverty, homelessness and a justified resentment. However, in the Northern Ireland context, it leads to disillusionment, and a spin-off, because the paramilitary organisations are readily available to exploit the problem. Unemployment and the lack of hope are probably the greatest recruiting sergeants for paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland.

It is surely the Government's duty to offer those young people hope in the form of increased opportunities and, in so doing, frustrate those who seek to take advantage of the frustration of Northern Ireland's young unemployed. The Government have consistently failed to deal with the problem of unemployment in Northern Ireland. I have outlined the statistics to show that this evening.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the training of young people in Northern Ireland, and the cuts taking place in training facilities?

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman speaks of a subject of which I have some experience. I recently visited a number of higher education institutions in the Province. There, I was told of the conflict between what the institutions can offer young people in terms of engineering training and qualifications, and what the training boards are doing in Northern Ireland. The two organisations seem to be at cross purposes, and funds are not properly directed at the

problem. The Government have not focused on the problem of training in the way that the hon. Gentleman and I believe they should.

I wish to mention the prospects for public expenditure in Northern Ireland. The Government have been engaged in across-the-board cuts in public expenditure, as well as the implementation of increased taxation and value added tax, in an attempt to dig themselves out of the economic hole into which they have plunged this country. In Northern Ireland, the increase in public expenditure announced by the Minister today and on other occasions amounts to a rise of just about 4 per cent. in 1994-95, which, allowing for inflation, represents very little change.

Recent changes to the health service in Northern Ireland have done nothing to redress the increased resources spent on health management and patient care. Instead, the health service in Northern Ireland has been faced with an extension of the Government's obsession with privatising, and commercialising health and social services care.

The Government use the language of the marketplace in an attempt to sell ill-health and rationalise the sick. In particular, the Government have repeated mistakes already made in other parts of the United Kingdom, and have failed adequately to fund the provision of community care in Northern Ireland. Caring for patients in the more familiar surroundings of their own homes will cost money. If the Government are genuine in their offer to those people, they must clearly find the wherewithal to ensure that care in the community is effective.

One effect of the Government's so-called rationalisation of health provision has already been felt by the Royal group of hospitals in Belfast. The city's hospital provision is to be cut by means of the merger of Northern Ireland's two biggest hospitals. This move will reduce already limited bed capacity by 20 per cent. of the total—that is, by 750 beds by 1997.

The record of the Royal Victoria hospital is agreed worldwide to be one of the very best. It currently boasts 36 specialties on the site—not only the greatest number in the United Kingdom but the greatest number in any hospital in Europe. In addition, at least five senior consultants at the hospital rightly enjoy worldwide reputations, and their opinions and lecturing skills are in demand the world over.

The plans to destroy the world-class capacity at the Royal Victoria hospital are strongly opposed by patients, medical staff and both local communities—and by people from across the region who receive such excellent care at the hospital.

The Royal Victoria is situated in the middle of the worst killing ground in Europe; it is regrettable that its experience is still required. Will the Minister therefore ask his noble Friend to look closely at the plans of the Eastern health and social services board, and to intervene to prevent the dismemberment of the Royal Victoria and the royal group of hospitals?

I note that the Prime Minister last week received a deputation of Northern Ireland doctors, who brought to his attention the enormous number of people who had signed a petition. There is real feeling in Northern Ireland, especially in Belfast, about this hospital. I hope that the Minister's noble Friend will not just brush off these genuine feelings.

As for electricity privatisation, the isolation of Northern Ireland's key electricity system, and its consequent vulnerability, mean that the strategic implications of privatisation should have warranted a much higher place in the consideration of the surrounding issues. It is clear, however, that the key factors behind the decision had nothing to do with an energy strategy, and were primarily based, first, on decisions by Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office that, in order to win their ideological spurs, they needed to play their part in the privatisation policies of the Government—however belatedly.

Secondly, the Treasury needed to acquire the assets from the sale to fund the ever-burgeoning public sector borrowing requirement. Both are short-term approaches. It is abundantly clear that energy provision needs instead to be based on strategic planning. Indeed, this short-termism is evident in the hands-off approach which the Department of Economic Development is now adopting.

Having put the legislation and the framework for privatisation in place, the Government and the Department have taken key decisions that have tied up long-term supply contracts, none of which can be cancelled before 1996. Further, the regulator is debarred from expressing an opinion on the decision to proceed with the interconnector to Scotland.

In my view, the DED and Ministers have taken decisions that are in the best interests of the DED and Ministers, not of Northern Ireland Electricity or the consumers there. They have achieved the political objective of privatising a major asset in Northern Ireland. They have brought £700 million into the Treasury and have been forced to concede only £14 million over four years to the larger groups of energy consumers by way of recompense.

Having taken the key decisions, Ministers can now stand back and, should anything go wrong, transfer the blame to the three key operators: the generators, the regulator and what they call market forces. The decisions already made on long-term contracts and the Scottish interconnector mean that the Department has effectively cut off debate about new generating capacity, and has tied the regulator's hands and ability to control existing generating contracts for some time to come.

I do not wish to trespass on the territory of tomorrow's debate on the privatisation of Belfast harbour, but I suspect that my hon. Friends will show that the dogmatic approach adopted by the Government, while refusing to take into account the unique regional circumstances of Northern Ireland, is short-sighted, and no more than an attempt to get their hands on the cash from that valuable asset.

This order represents nothing more than a shuffling of an already meagre budget for Northern Ireland. The Minister has nothing new to offer, particularly for the unemployed. Of that, the Government should be thoroughly ashamed—

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): Just before the hon. Gentleman sits down, will he answer one question? He accuses the Government of spending too little in Northern Ireland. How much does he intend to spend if he comes to power —and how would he pay for it?

Mr. Stott: The Minister and the Northern Ireland Office have produced a report for the scrutiny of the House; it is my function to point out its shortcomings to him, which I believe I have done with some clarity. It is not my duty this evening to tell him what we would or would not do: it is the Minister who has to answer for his actions in Northern Ireland. I am pointing out to him the disgraceful amount of

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unemployment there. In his position as a retread, he cannot get away from the fact that the Government have been in office for 15 years, or from the issue of unemployment.

7.36 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): This debate gives us an opportunity to deal with matters of grave concern to those who represent Northern Ireland in the House. The Opposition spokesman highlighted the high rate of unemployment in our Province. No public representative of Northern Ireland could be happy with that. Some of our constituencies enjoy better rates of employment than others, and we are happy for those who are in that fortunate position. In general, however, every Northern Ireland Member feels grave concern about the matter.

I regret the fact that no member of the Social Democratic and Labour party is present for the debate. We may disagree vigorously with the SDLP about the constitution, but here is one matter that should unite all our public representatives: the future well-being and prosperity of the people of Northern Ireland. Our people should be able to earn their livelihoods, get a rate for the job and bring up their families in the conditions that they would want.

Let no one underestimate the seriousness of the unemployment problem in our Province. Ministers on the Front Bench—they appear to be smiling at the moment, but I do not suppose that they are smiling at this—need to acknowledge the seriousness and scale of the problem, and show us that they have in mind measures to bring about some alleviation of it. Perhaps then we will be on the road to the day when there will be ample employment for members of every class of society in Northern Ireland.

I am especially concerned about training in Northern Ireland. Those in the training centres training our young people fear that there is to be a cut in funding that will result in great heartache for our youngsters, especially in the working-class districts of our city of Belfast. I note that the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) is nodding and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) fully agrees with what I am saying.

I am not in a position to speak for parts of the Province other than the city in which I live, but there is a concern throughout Northern Ireland that financial cuts in training projects will knock the heart out of many young people who, when they leave school, look first to training. I pay a warm tribute to those who have dedicated their lives to training. I have visited the training centres and I am amazed by the large percentage of the youngsters whom they train who obtain permanent jobs rather than simply joining the unemployment queues. We should be grateful for that. The Minister's mind must be full of all the information that he is about to release. It will be like Noah's flood. Can he tell us something about training? Will there be a serious cut in funding?

There has been a series of crises in agriculture. The low prices in the pig sector seem to have stabilised or to have improved a little. However, there is still a difficulty because of our peripheral location and our distance from United Kingdom and EC markets. That means an added cost on imports, especially animal feed and, consequently, an increase in output costs. Northern Ireland producers face a supplement of at least £12 a tonne on freight costs for feed. That is a disadvantage and I urge the Government to do something about it.

There are two ways in which the Government could tackle the problem. First, there could be a feed cost equalisation premium to ease the farmers through their days of difficulty. Secondly, we could do something that other EC member states do—exploit our EC membership. We could ask for intervention grain to be stored in Northern Ireland. The EC, not the Government, would then pay for the transport. It would also pay the rent for the grain to be stored. When the farmers have an emergency, they could use that grain for the same price as is being paid in the remainder of the United Kingdom. That is what other EC countries do, so why do we not do so to help the hard-pressed farmers of Northern Ireland?

When the Minister replies and releases that tremendous flood of information on us, will he also respond to that vital point? I have been pressing it for a long time. Indeed, I have pressed it in Europe and the Commissioners tell me that they envisage no difficulty with my suggestion. Therefore, we should be prepared to exploit the system for the benefit of our farmers.

There is great concern in Northern Ireland about animal health and the dangers posed to the Province through the introduction of diseased animals from countries where internal controls and health measures are less vigorously enforced. Northern Ireland has an agriculture system second to none. We can boast about it and the way that it is run.

I pay tribute to the noble Lady Denton, the Under-Secretary. She has given her energy and zeal to helping the farming community and it would be churlish of me not to acknowledge that. Indeed, I was glad to carry her bags to the plane today as I felt that it would show that some people appreciate what she has done for the Province. I am glad that she is to join the Minister at talks in Brussels so that there will be direct representation of the Northern Ireland position. Anyone who knows anything about Europe knows that deals are made between Ministers, not civil servants.

A tremendous problem faces Northern Ireland agriculture. I believe in the environment and I believe that we should preserve our heritage and our environmental assets in the rural countryside. However, instead of being dictators, environmentalists should be partners with the farming community. They should help the farmers to preserve the rural environment. That is important.

The Minister must face the difficulties in agricultural planning. All hon. Members with rural constituencies with farming communities are pestered daily with a particular problem. The mother and father have done their stint on the farm and they want a retirement bungalow on their land. They want to end their lives on their own property. The Government are doing all that they can to block the necessary planning applications. I raised the matter on the last occasion that we debated the appropriation order, but nothing has happened. The cottages are tied to an agricultural lease and must be used by someone working in agriculture.

When old people retire and die a house is vacant, but that house cannot be let to anyone other than someone working full time on a farm. Today, there are few full-time farmers in Northern Ireland. The agricultural position in Northern Ireland is different; there is a different playing field. The former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member

for Bridgwater (Mr. King), knows all about that. I ask the Government to investigate the matter and release houses so that they can be sold or rented to people who want to live in the countryside but cannot fulfil the present lease agreement. I urge the Minister to study that matter urgently.

A document that was published on planning in the countryside mentioned farmers only once. It was very good of its authors even to mention that farmers lived in the country. I asked one of them to show me the word "farmer" and he replied, "That was a big mistake. We should have used it more often."

We were told that there would be an easing of planning procedures, and that appeals would run more smoothly and be more realistic. That is neither my experience nor that of my colleagues in the House, who have complained to me that they have great difficulty with rural planning.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the relaxed procedure was introduced as a consequence of a court case that found against the planning service, but a subsequent action overturned the original decision—so the planners are back where they started?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I want not procedures founded on a court case, but the law changed so that the lease and original planning condition can be broken. We know that the system is not working. There was a time when it was all right and people were happy, but that is not so today.

Linked with farming is fishing, and investment is needed in modern port facilities. The Minister with responsibilities for that aspect knows that to be true, from her visits to fishing communities. I am sure that they put their case far better than I could. Slipways are needed, specially at Kelkeel, and so are improved ice production plants, to meet the needs of the fishing fleet.

General Government policy in Europe is greatly restricting days at sea for our fishermen, who are being pushed to the limit. There is strict policing of fisheries in Northern Ireland—there are no Nelsons putting their telescopes to a blind eye. Serious problems have arisen at the quayside, and the Government must seriously pursue that matter.

We are seeing the opening up of the waters of the Irish box to the Spanish fishing fleet. When they arrive, it will not be like the Spanish Armada, when God sent his winds and broke it to pieces. This time, the Spanish will break our fishing facilities to pieces. One thinks of the number of Spanish vessels with double bottoms, so that they can take from the sea three or four times the allowed quota.

The United Kingdom had a good card to play, because it is our waters that the Spanish are fishing, but previous Governments and the present Government have not played that card. They should have vetoed some of the concessions that were made to other nations in respect of access to our fishing waters.

A problem also exists in respect of the electricity interconnector with Scotland. Carrickfergus and Larne councils have come out in opposition to the interconnector. It is feared that 700 jobs in the Northern Ireland power industry could be lost. With electricity prices rising, a serious situation could arise. Also, environmental damage could be done to the unspoiled part of Island Magee. Environmental groups in Galloway are also opposed to the Scottish installation.

I know that there is to be an inquiry, but will the Minister accept its findings? In the past, the Government have put their pen through the findings of certain inquiries that they did not like. What was the use? Will the Minister say tonight that whatever may be the result of investigations, the Government may be depended upon to ensure that the inquiry's findings are implemented? That is something that the Minister cannot dodge. He comes from Scotland himself and must know something of the agitation there.

All of us are concerned about the completed feasibility study into the building of a new university of Ulster campus at Springvale in west Belfast, which will require the injection of £100 million. There are fears that money would have to be taken from other education projects in Northern Ireland and its education budget. Perhaps the Minister could say something about that tonight. People are worried as to how the continuing revenue costs of such a university would be met.

There is the continuing threat of closure of small rural schools, and continuing pressure on schoolteachers, parents and pupils from educational reforms. I say to the Minister who is to reply, who has responsibilities for education in Northern Ireland, that his reaction to deputations has been appreciated. The Minister has listened, taken some propositions on board and been helpful in many cases. However, there is much concern about the educational issues that I mentioned.

Northern Ireland still has a big housing problem. Is the Minister prepared to review the amount of money allocated to housing in the Province, which still has housing queues? One can find married couples with children who are still living with their in-laws. At a home that I visited the other day, the whole family—mother, father and four children —slept in one room. One would think it possible for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to do something, but it is not prepared to purchase ground and build new houses in that area. People do not want to leave the neighbourhood in which they were brought up, and they should not have to do so. They should be rehoused in the same district. The Housing Executive should immediately be given the proper resources to undertake necessary work. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

As to roads, on 16 June the Under-Secretary said:

"I welcome the inward investment project to which the hon. Gentleman referred and I recognise the importance of access to Larne port. We hope to upgrade part of the road in 1997-98." —[*Official Report*, 16 June 1994; Vol. 244, c. 749.]

Which part of the road does the Minister intend to upgrade during that time? The Minister who opened the debate, who told us that his colleague would answer, must have been reading *Hansard*, or must have known what was in the mind of his other colleague; he was certainly very confident about what was in the mind of the Minister of State who is sitting next to him this evening. We have been given a date, and I wonder what will happen in 1997-98.

What will happen to the road from Ballymena to Antrim, the A26? As Member of Parliament for Antrim, North, I feel very aggrieved. The hospital for which the land was purchased should have been our main hospital, but it was taken from us. A firm promise was made that the roads to Antrim from Ballymena and further north would be designed so that people who became ill and had to be transported for half an hour, three quarters of an hour or an hour would have good roads on which to travel. That promise has not been kept.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

The Antrim hospital, which is now up and running, is not sufficiently accessible to the people. It should be serving an area from as far north as Ballymoney, and even Coleraine, down to the borders of Antrim. Moreover, we were promised cars, ambulances and other conveyances. A committee was set up to monitor what happened in Larne. When people become ill in the night or have an accident, they are rushed to Antrim; the ambulance then leaves, and after receiving treatment those people must sit in the hospital all night because there is no transport to return them to Larne. That is happening repeatedly.

I hope that the Minister will tell us what he knows about the problems with the new hospital in Antrim. If he knows nothing, perhaps he will make inquiries and write to me. This is a serious matter, and it is coming to a head: there will be more problems with people being taken to hospital and simply left there.

I am also very concerned about the European rail link. The official map that has been issued shows just one link, with Dublin; there are branch links elsewhere on the island of Ireland. I raised the matter by means of a deputation, and the Commissioner said that he would look at it. I do not know what the current position is.

I do know, however, that there is tremendous agitation in the Irish Republic, which is trying to destroy the port of Larne. Larne is the second largest port in the United Kingdom—a good port, which used European money wisely and well. European Commissioners have taken photographs and exploited the port, saying, "This is the way in which European money is being used to benefit society." Now, the money that helped to make the port what it is, will be sidetracked in an attempt to take the volume of traffic away from Larne and keep it in the Republic.

As we know, the shortest sea route is across to Scotland. It is sad that the rail link has been closed, for big business could be done. I trust that, in their representations to Europe, Ministers will push for Larne's status to be maintained. It was established with the aid of European money, and has shown that it can produce the goods. I hope that we shall see a fight for its salvation. If European funds for the Dublin to Holyhead route are to be increased, let that be countered with similar funds to make the roads to Larne what they ought to be.

Finally, I believe that the Royal hospital should be kept. Unfortunately, it has a location problem, but one that the people of Northern Ireland have weathered. Given its international standing, the hospital should be preserved and helped. I think that there is a good place, too, for the City hospital, and that the hospital appreciates that.

Patients from Cork can be operated on in the Royal Victoria hospital, while patients from my constituency have to go to Scotland. There is something wrong with that. No one in the medical world would challenge the capability of the Royal hospital, whose surgeons and other professionals have the highest qualifications and have proved it worldwide. Why should our people have to travel to Scotland for operations, while people in the Republic can use the facilities of the Royal Victoria hospital? A hospital must serve its own community first; then, if it has places for others, it must serve them. I hope that the Minister can give us more information about the treatment of patients outside Northern Ireland when we have the facilities in Northern Ireland, and beds in Northern Ireland hospitals are being closed.

We are all very concerned about old people, and about the senior citizens' homes over which there is now a question mark. The other day, at one of those homes, I spoke to an old lady who was over 90. She told me, "I have been here for more than 20 years and I should like to end my days here, but I am told that I may have to be shifted away from the few friends I have left in this community." Such action is not good for the aged, or for those who should be looking after them. Let me issue a plea for sympathy and concern for the aged in our Province: let us not close, willy-nilly, homes that have done such good service to the community. There is much emphasis on home care nowadays, but some people cannot go home because they need care all the time. If they can be cared for at home and want to be there, that is fine; but the needs of some cannot be met through home care, and we must provide for them.

Those are some of the matters that concern me. I hope that the Minister will give them his attention.

8.9 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I begin by taking issue with the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), who said, in praising the Royal Victoria hospital, that it was situated in the middle of the worst killing ground in Europe. I know that we have our problems, but we have not yet approached the level of killing in places such as Bosnia. I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will agree that his words were not as wisely chosen as many of the rest of his remarks.

Mr. Stott: I acknowledge that I said that, but I had meant to say "in the European Community". I acknowledge that in the past two or three years we have seen dreadful scenes in some areas of Bosnia. Even the hon. Gentleman would not deny, however, that in the past few years the area around the hospital in Belfast has been a terrible place for people being killed.

Mr. Ross: I acknowledge that, not least because the area is within a square mile of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) and the number of deaths has been horrendous. It would wrong, however, to let folk outside Northern Ireland or even the United Kingdom believe that the position is worse than it is. God knows, it is bad enough—we do not have to add to the misery.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) discussed retirement dwellings and the right to sell. No one should be under any delusions that this is a difficult matter. Hon. Members will know that I am a farmer, so I am well aware of the problem and of the extended family nature of the farming community in Northern Ireland. Two or even three generations can be resident on or near the family farm. I fear that, if we loosen the right to sell too much, applications for other dwellings will be made in 10 or 20 years' time. The Minister is nodding and I am sure that note has been taken of the matter. I hope that there will be some loosening of the right to take tenants into such accommodation, which would often relieve farmers of the problem for years. The matter is worthy of consideration.

While I am on the issue of planning, I should like to raise an issue that has caused me some concern. A large

housing development was constructed in my constituency, after which other constituents found that water pressure had disappeared from their homes. I made inquiries and was told that the Water Executive was doing its best to remedy the problem and that, within the next month or so, it would be remedied. When I made further inquiries, the water service told me that the development was such that water demand would be outside the range of the existing main and that the developer should liaise with the Water Executive.

That is fair enough as far as it goes, but I hope that the provision of public utilities such as water will be given greater consideration. Towns such as Coleraine and Limavady are expanding like mad, but not enough consideration is given by the planning authority at an early stage as to whether a public utility—water, sewerage or electricity—will be up to the job. That creates enormous problems for people moving into dwellings. I should say that that is the first time in my 20 years in the House that such a matter has been brought to my attention. If it is happening in my constituency, I am sure that it is happening in others, and I see one or two heads nodding in agreement. Some consideration should be given to improving procedures to deal with such problems.

The next problem is of constituents who contract a rare medical condition. I am sure that every hon. Member knows that there are an endless variety of medical conditions, many of which are very rare. As it happens, this year three totally new conditions have been brought to my attention. In the first case, the individual was told by doctors, including the consultant at the Royal Victoria hospital, that he had multiple sclerosis. It was then discovered that he did not and that he was possibly the only person in Northern Ireland with that particular disease, but that he could be cured by a difficult and delicate operation. His family faced a horrendous time in the period between the diagnosis and the operation.

The second case appeared to involve hlyasthema gravis —an awful auto-immune disease that causes fluctuating, sometimes fatal, weakness. Again, the individual involved suffered many problems. The third case involved a constituent who I know personally and who had contracted dystonia, the symptoms of which are very nasty. He and his wife were working. Over a period of months, he suffered increasing and great pain. The family income went down enormously because he had to leave his work. Like most young couples buying a house, he was a comparatively young man. Doctors had some difficulty identifying the condition. They also ran into a series of problems in relation to the financial help to which they were entitled —a problem that is common to the cases of the three individuals who wrote or came to see me.

Families in that position, often with no experience of how the social security system works, face severe problems. They look to all the statutory agencies for help and experience difficulty in receiving disability living allowance, severe disability allowance, mobility allowance and other benefits. As only the wife is working, they suffer an horrendous drop in family income, which has a devastating effect on the family.

I am not an expert in such matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) knows a lot more about them than I do. The Government must consider them because they involve distressing cases. It may not always be true that hard cases make bad law, but sometimes they call for rather more sympathy than is readily apparent to those of us who are brought face to face with the consequences of such illnesses. The matter goes much wider than that. So far this year, I have had three cases. Heaven only knows what horrors await hon. Members at their next constituency surgery or in the post tomorrow morning. I hope, therefore, that the Government will consider the matter.

I have heard of one or two cases where students were involved in motor accidents and were unable to continue their studies for some time, or suffered an illness that rendered it impossible for them to return to their studies. As they had not been paying national insurance contributions, they could not draw the benefits that were available to other people. They intend to return to their studies. Those involved in car accidents may, in some cases, eventually receive some compensation, but they have to get from where they are to that happy position. In the intervening period, some of them are without any income and are totally dependent on their parents, who are often incapable of supporting them.

Something needs to be done. I have corresponded with the Minister in regard to one student. I hope that the problem will be resolved because it is clearly a United Kingdom-wide problem. It needs to be looked at and dealt with sympathetically to allow these young people some income while they are recovering until, eventually, they can continue their studies. It would be an enormous waste if those young people said that they were giving up their studies and surrendering the possibility of grant.

The next matter has occupied quite a few column inches in my local newspapers. It arises out of the large payments now being made for electricity produced under the non-fossil fuel obligation. The Minister is well aware that there has been a hullabaloo over the wind farm on Rigged hill. There is some talk about what is happening at Corkey, but that is not my immediate problem because it is in another constituency. There is continuing concern and unease in the community in Limavady about the Rigged hill project, although the council has decided that it will not raise any objection, even after listening to the folk on both sides of the question at a recent special meeting.

It is interesting that the Northern Ireland legislation appears not to require a formal environmental impact study. At least in the Corkey case and in the case of Rigged hill, an informal report was prepared. I have looked at the 1985 EC directive and at the United Kingdom regulations that brought it into force in 1989.

It is interesting that two categories are covered under the EC directive and the regulations. There is a need for reports on the water generation of electricity and for generation through thermal stations. Indeed, the legislation runs rather wider than that. Nowhere is wind generation mentioned. We are told that we must take into consideration all the developments that have an impact on the landscape, as the EC directive says, and on the environment, as the regulations say—in civil servants' eyes, those phrases may or may not mean the same thing—in terms of the visual effect.

I have seen wind farms in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Anyone who says that they are not intrusive is living in a dream world. The wind farms can be seen from many miles away. In the report on Rigged hill, folk were told that the windmills would be 30 m high. In fact, they will be 60 m high—four or five times the capacity of the project originally mentioned.

Sir John Wheeler *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ross: I see the Minister nodding. He is well aware of the fact.

The matter is not as simple as it appears and we need to take a careful look at wind generation generally. Rigged hill is part of the escarpment that runs from Benevenagh in the north to beyond the Glen Shane pass, a distance of 20 to 25 miles. Every inch of that escarpment is a first-rate place for a wind farm. Whenever I mentioned that to the planners, they said, "Wind farms will not be built the whole way along." My immediate reaction was, "Why not?" It must be one of the best sites in the British Isles for a series of wind farms.

We need to sit down and put on our thinking caps before going any further down this road. The beauty of the countryside and its tourist potential are such that we must have some regard for the visual impact. There are not normally many folk on those hills, which are hundreds of feet high. However, we must think rather more seriously about the whole matter than has been the case hitherto.

The constituent who raised the matter with me pointed out that there was a letter, which is mentioned in the documentation, which was sent to the B9 energy section from the Londonderry division of the town and country planning service on 24 November 1992. There was also a letter to EM Consultants on 21 May 1993. My constituent has been unable to see the letters. I assume that, as they have been issued by a public body, they should be available to the public. I should be grateful if the Minister would give an undertaking to place them in the Library and then tell me when they are there because I would like to see them.

Environmental impact studies have a whole series of regulations surrounding them. They are supposed to be available to the public and copies are supposed to be made available to the general public. Councillors are supposed to be told about them. The reports prepared in these two cases were allegedly available, but they were never advertised. No one knew that the reports were available for examination. My constituent, who found out about them more or less by accident and then went to have a look, is not very happy. If we go down this road, the general public must be taken along with us. They must be given an opportunity to object to anything that they think might have a long-term detrimental effect on the landscape in which they live. I hope that planners will be rather more open about such matters in the future.

I want to touch on one or two other matters, not least the horrendous case of pollution in the River Strule. As the House knows, I believe that work keeps interfering with my angling. I am afraid that I do not get very much angling done these days.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Shame.

Mr. Ross: It is a shame—a dreadful shame. The duties of this place and our duties to our constituents dictate that we must spend a lot of time away from the river bank.

Unfortunately, someone let a large amount of wood preservative into the Strule. As the Minister, who is also a keen angler, knows well, nine miles of the river were poisoned to the extent that the water plants were killed. It was not a happy situation. We were fortunate that the salmon smolts were away, but that did not protect the resident fish or the following year's salmon smolts in that area. It was a large kill.

I believe that the source of the pollution has been traced. I hope that remedial measures will be taken and that measures will be put in hand to ensure that such an incident is extremely unlikely to happen again. We have far too much pollution. Every year, we have a whole catalogue of disasters. The people who are responsible wash their hands in public and say, "We are very sorry that it happened. Please leave us alone and we shall get on with the work." The reality is that many people use the water for recreation, and they have put time and money into their activities, often on a voluntary basis. It is just not good enough that people seem to be able to walk away from these horrible pollution incidents, which damage other people, and that they get off practically scot-free.

I now turn to sub-head 3 of the vote for the Department of Finance and Personnel, which refers to money being spent on community relations and cultural traditions. It is all intended to improve relations between the various sections of the community in Northern Ireland. We then find that the way in which the Secretary of State intends to improve community relations is to bow to the Irish republican demand that street names should be put up in Irish.

I do not know who advised the Secretary of State and I do not know which Minister is responsible for the matter. It is just about the daftest idea that has come out of the Northern Ireland Office for many a day. Will the Government never learn that, if they take all those soft stories at face value, all they do is annoy far more people than they please? I do not hear Irish spoken very often in the streets of Dungiven, which I would have thought is one of the places where one may well expect to hear it. I do not hear it in everyday use and I do not think that many people do.

Since Irish has been taught and learned in Northern Ireland, it has been for a blatantly sectarian and political purpose rather than an educational one. If the Minister does not like that, he should go back and examine the evidence and he would gladly come to the conclusion that my assessment is correct. That proposal should be dropped and the money should be used for something far more useful. While talking about how the Government may use that money, may I point out that Limavady grammar school is still waiting for the go-ahead for its building programme. That money would make a favourable start in that process.

I hope that it will not be long before the Minister accepts the good advice which arose from several quarters and from the General Synod of the Church of Ireland—as it happens, it was held in Cork this year—where a number of leading clergy drew attention to the nonsense of integrated schools in the Northern Ireland context. We have been told that everybody has their freedom. I well remember the roots of the whole idea of total parental freedom of choice, rather than dealing with the schools in which there was something wrong. I am aware that the Government are so heavily committed to the idea that they are unlikely to change their mind, but if they had any wit they would drop it and some of the other proposals and get on with providing a proper education in every school in Northern Ireland. Then, if people are anxious to go to good schools, they can go to state schools and the voluntary grammar schools, which are largely integrated anyway.

I also hope that the Government have not lost sight of the need for the Coleraine hospital, despite the diminished number of beds which, apparently, are to be provided in Northern Ireland in a few years' time.

8.31 pm

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): For a number of years I have been fighting, and fighting relentlessly, on behalf of the Banks residential home in Bangor in my constituency to prevent the closure of that excellent home, which provides facilities for elderly people. I have been fighting to stop the dispersal of the residents there—senior citizens—who have come to regard the Banks as their own home.

A year ago, I presented a petition to Parliament, which was signed by many thousands of people. In all, 16,000 local people have signed petitions for the retention of that valuable facility in my constituency. I have written numerous letters to the Secretary of State for Health, to her predecessors and to the chairman of the Eastern health and social services board and other officials. Yet the threat of the closure of Banks and the eviction of the residents still hang over the heads of those vulnerable, elderly people. I therefore take this opportunity once again of protesting in the strongest possible terms at the inhumane way in which those people are being treated.

It would indeed be unfortunate if the Banks residential home were closed. It would be a traumatic experience for everyone in the home. For a group of frail, elderly people, with an average age of 85, it is devastating, and that devastation is being imposed on them by a body which is supposed to be statutorily charged with their welfare. That is a mockery. I refer, of course, to the North Down and Ards community health and social services trust, which no longer seems to believe in democratic accountability to the people that it is supposed to serve.

There is widespread community support throughout the North Down area for the plight of those poor people. The fight to prevent the closure has been organised and co-ordinated by a body of people known as the Friends of the Banks, led by Mrs. Marion Smith, the chairman of the pressure group. I pay tribute to her and her colleagues.

The campaign is based not only on emotion, although I must admit that I feel emotionally involved with those unfortunate people who seem to be pawns of an unthinking bureaucracy, but on the logical argument that there is a continuing need for the Banks. The home provides a first-class facility for full-time residential care, for respite care and as a base for a whole range of community support facilities for the elderly.

Indeed, the local unit trust appeared to accept that the Banks residential home is a first-class facility. Its own inspection team has given it top marks as a first-class establishment, and I can confirm that from my experience over the 24 years during which I have been a Member of Parliament for the constituency of North Down. I have visited it frequently each year, and I have long had connections with the Banks through meeting its residents and meeting relatives there and attending some of the functions there. I have always been impressed by the care and the consideration shown by all the staff towards the residents, and I know that that impression would be strongly endorsed by the residents and their relatives.

Mr. William O'Brien: I appreciate the opportunity to intervene on this important issue. The hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) has described the appalling situation over the application by the people who form the trust. Is it not a fact that we are witnessing what we described would happen—undemocratic, unrepresentative, unthinking people appointed to the trust by the Minister? Does not the hon. Gentleman feel that he should condemn the way in which the trusts have been formed and the lack of democratic accountability of those appointed trusts?

Sir James Kilfedder: I readily adopt what the hon. Gentleman says about the attitude of the people in that unit of management. It was my opinion that they were there to serve the people. Certainly all the people that I have met felt that the people appointed to the trust are not serving them, the people of North Down, but are serving themselves and masters elsewhere. They are there to serve the people—the patients, the elderly and all those in need. In my view—I accept what the hon. Gentleman has said—they are falling down on their duty and turning a deaf ear to the pleas of people in this case: the supporters, the relatives and the residents of the Banks residential home.

The only reason for suggesting the closure of the home is that the site is a valuable one and its sale would partly provide the cash for alternative community care facilities. I am not certain whether the cash would be used wisely. I am sure that the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) would echo that fear. The home is on a valuable site. The land, I understand, was given by a private individual for the specific purpose of providing the home. However, once the home is sold, developers may buy the land, but the money from the sale may be wasted on some other project. I feel that it is a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul if, in fact, the trust intends to provide some other facilities, although I wonder whether, at the end of the day, it will. Surely we have not reached the stage at which progress in community care provision is achieved at the expense of the elderly and vulnerable residents of the Banks.

Leaving aside the sense of outrage at the proposal, the consultation has been abysmally handled by the unit trust. It has been forced to make postponement after postponement because it has mishandled the consultation. It was forced by the High Court to appoint an advocate to represent the old people at the home. The latest postponement arose from representations by the High Court about the way in which advocacy had been handled.

All the delays are simply adding to the trauma of the residents, who are becoming increasingly upset and depressed. Indeed, my latest information is that they are being given conflicting information by the unit trust about the outcome of the legal proceedings. Surely the fact that the unit trust has been endlessly forced to delay its procedures shows that the proposal is seriously flawed. Why cannot those old people be taken out of their misery by receiving an assurance that the Banks residential home will not close?

The situation has become so unreasonable that I strongly urge the Minister to intervene and to direct the unit trust that, in the interests of the old people, the closure procedure should be indefinitely abandoned.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I am sure that the hon. Member will be glad to know that many people throughout the House wholeheartedly support his contention and his appeal to the Minister. I am sure that the Minister, realising the strength of feeling in the House, will do something about it.

Sir James Kilfedder: I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend. I hope that his words will be taken in by the Minister. Perhaps we could have a positive response

[Sir James Kilfedder]

when he replies to the debate. If action is not taken quickly, there will be a powerful feeling in Bangor and in the rest of my constituency of North Down that no one in authority cares any more.

I am most anxious that elderly people should remain in their own home as long as is humanly possible; I have said that often in the House. It is good for them to remain in the area that they know and where they have friends and where their church and other facilities are located. However, they need help with cleaning the house, making a main meal, lighting fires, washing and maintenance of the garden. That means the provision of home helps and other carers. Therefore, it is lamentable that home help hours have been seriously reduced and elderly people are left with less support. Our senior citizens are vulnerable at all hours of the day and night. I am absolutely disgusted that they do not receive the help that their years of service to the community entitle them to in the twilight of their life.

Elderly people are vulnerable in many ways. I drew attention only a short time ago in the Chamber to the way in which some youths have behaved towards elderly people. Greater action is needed. More police ought to be provided to stop gangs of youths banging on the doors of elderly people's houses late at night, throwing rubbish into their gardens, urinating on their front doors, writing obscenities on their walls and so on. We ought really to try to safeguard and look after our senior citizens. They deserve not just compassion but support, and something must be done to protect them and to give them the quality of life that they surely deserve.

8.44 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): First, I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that, during the last Northern Ireland Question Time, his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland referred to the A8 to Larne. If he looks up the reference, perhaps he will find out precisely what are the plans for that road. I agree with what has already been said about the importance of the Larne road and the A26, which is essential to the north of the Province and to the new hospital in Antrim.

Vote 2 of the Department of the Environment vote is for housing. We have received a considerable number of complaints both by letter and in the House about the inset fires fitted in Housing Executive houses. I have made my views known on the matter. Many of the complaints were well justified, although there was a great deal of scaremongering as well. I took the matter up with the Housing Executive at the invitation of the Minister and with the National Coal Board and the Coal Advisory Service. I found that both bodies had been working hard to find out just what the problems were.

I have seen test rigs and I can tell the House that the investigations have been exhaustive. Up to the present, they have been inconclusive in some respects, but the Executive and the Coal Advisory Service have certainly done their utmost to try to solve the problem. There is a problem with the fires and a problem with the flues. Those problems have been investigated. The point can certainly be made that the fires are not terribly handy for the elderly people who use them. There is a tendency to keep out all the draughts in a room. Unfortunately, to make a fire burn properly and keep alight a certain amount of air is required.

I welcome the fact that the Housing Executive is now looking at a new open fire, similar to the old Baxi-type fire, which draws in air almost artificially. I have great hopes for that fire. It would certainly serve and please those people who wish to have an open fire and at the same time run a given number of radiators, using fuel which is suitable for clean air zones. I put those points on the record now because in the past I have criticised the Housing Executive and the Minister on the matter.

An allocation problem still exists in the Housing Executive. None of us envies the job of the allocation officers because when they please one person they disappoint a hundred, but there is a case to be made for a return to giving some preference to local applicants. Unfortunately, if there are empty houses—or voids, as the Housing Executive calls them—in a given area, folk come in from all sorts of places to occupy them and local applicants are turned down because those coming in from outside appear to have greater priority. That matter should be examined. We should keep the local people in the locality where they have been brought up and wish to remain.

I was interested to hear what the hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) said about care in the community. I certainly agree with all that he said. However, if we are to have care in the community, the Housing Executive also has a responsibility to provide proper housing for those people. Elderly people who want to live in the community or who are being asked to live in the community certainly cannot climb stairs or live in an upstairs flat. They require suitable housing.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on this important subject. Is he aware that pensioners and their families have been prohibited from buying their Housing Executive homes, although in some cases those homes may be in low-demand areas?

Mr. Forsythe: I am aware of that, although I was made aware of it only a short time ago. I understand—perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) will keep me right on this—that even if pensioners have the cash to buy their home, the Housing Executive will not allow them to buy it. That is unfair. If pensioners have the cash and can buy a home without even getting a mortgage, I cannot see what objections there could be. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised that matter.

We have certain types of houses which are not being occupied. Sadly, that means that some areas are going downhill because we have a lot of empty houses. That is a great pity because there is a shortage of certain types of housing. Perhaps that matter, too, can be examined.

I remind the Minister of a problem from the past which, unfortunately, is still ongoing. I understand that the case of the Orlit houses has not been settled. A certain type of Orlit house is still causing problems. I understand that the tenants of Orlit houses which were sold by an unregistered housing association are not being treated in the same way as tenants in registered housing association houses.

Mr. Molyneaux: I know that my hon. Friend shares my concern for a fairly large group of Orlit home owners in Lisburn in my constituency who have through no fault of their own have fallen foul of what appears to be a defect in the law because their houses were built by an unregistered housing association. There seems to be some slippage in

the drafting of the legislation between what I call the Ian Gow Bill and the Order in Council. We had to wait three years for the Order in Council. When it emerged, it seemed to be defective. I wonder whether my hon. Friends the Members for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) and for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) would accompany me to see the appropriate Minister, because it is a grave injustice.

Mr. Forsythe: I would certainly be willing to meet the Minister about such an important matter, and I would be pleased if my colleagues were in a position to go together.

The hon. Member for North Down referred to vandalism on housing estates. There is a case to be made for joint action to be instituted between the police, the Housing Executive and the social services. We have great problems in certain housing estates, and that is a great pity. Unfortunately, we find that when one bad tenant is put into a housing estate, within a short time 70 per cent. of the people on the housing estate want to be transferred.

Sadly, I have to point out that in some areas the drug problem is also serious. It is difficult for public representatives to explain to constituents who are worried about vandalism and drug problems that it would appear that certain things cannot be done. I ask the Minister to examine the situation carefully. Perhaps a task force involving local councils and so on could be set up to examine the situation and try to resolve some of the problems in this respect as they are serious for those who live in certain areas. It is sad that there are such problems.

Vote 4 of the Department of the Environment vote is for planning. I agree with all that has been said about tied dwellings. I am also concerned about the situation in which farmers, their families and others cannot seem to be able to build on their own ground. I shall digress slightly from what my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) said. My sympathy is with my constituents, not with the planners trying to keep people from building.

If we are to keep people on the land, and to keep the farming community as a family or a group, we should make allowances for that. Certainly, if we are to have empty cottages or bungalows throughout the whole of Northern Ireland simply because there is a planning rule which says that they cannot be sold or let to people who are not in the farming community, the purpose of spending millions of pounds on building Housing Executive houses escapes me if we cannot use them. I agree that that matter should be examined again.

One gets annoyed when one phones the planning service and the planning service says that these are the new guidelines. The guidelines have not been through the House; they are decided by the planning service. We are not told about them. There is no local council input. The decision is taken and the guidelines are then presented to us as being set in stone and we cannot change them. We greatly object to that.

We naturally object when enforcement is requested but is not carried out. Yet when we do not want enforcement, the planning service does it. Sometimes I think—and I say this to my friends in the planning service in my area—that they are perverse in that if we want something done, they do the opposite, but perhaps I am being unfair.

I wish to refer to vote 5 on the Department of Health and Social Services, and I want to put on record that we in Northern Ireland also have problems with the Child Support Agency. I know that the subject gets a lot of mileage in the Select Committee on Social Security—of which I am a member—and I know that we have debates in the House about it, but the same applies in Northern Ireland as applies in the rest of the United Kingdom.

There are complaints about the CSA and hold-ups in assessments. We know that letters are not being answered and phone calls are not being returned—at least we are told that. That seems to be the same in Northern Ireland as in other parts of the United Kingdom. The same points are made on the subject. Why should clean breaks not be accepted? The debt switch arising from divorces and the travel-to-work expenses of the absent parent are not allowed for. Fifty per cent. of the pension contribution is allowed, not 100 per cent.

If a lady marries a man who is an absent parent, her income is immediately taken into account to keep the children of the absent parent. Some people would say that those things are not supposed to happen, but we know that they are happening. Sadly, that is the case, although even natural justice should demand that those things should not happen. It is rather unfortunate.

It is accepted that, when the subject of the CSA went through the House, everyone agreed that it was a good idea that parents should look after their children. Everyone would have applauded that, but there is a way of doing it and we should look at the subject again seriously. I must emphasise to the House that I and my colleagues are well aware that the staff of the CSA are doing precisely what the House requested them to do, and it is most unfair to hear about the aggravation which CSA staff are receiving. We must try to change the system to help those who are disadvantaged by it, but people should not take it out on the workers. We in the House gave them a task which they are now doing.

I would like to mention also "The Future of Pensions" recommendations which will be debated by the House and which will also apply to Northern Ireland. I know that the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) will understand when I say that improvements and changes in pensions law should be brought in as soon as possible.

One thinks of evidence given by the Harland and Wolff management regarding the pension fund. They seemed to treat the members, former members and workers with great disdain and did not pay any particular attention to their views. I understand that the management saw the report and thought that it supported what they had done. In fact, the position was the absolute opposite. The pension fund trustees have not yet appointed a representative from the pensioners—unless one counts the chairman, who has now retired but remains as chairman of the trustees; one wonders whether he perhaps regards himself as a representative of the pensioners.

I hope that when the privatisation processes for the airport and the port of Belfast are taking place the Government will take into account the ideas and the new proposals in "The Future of Pensions" and build those into the pensions provisions in the privatisation of those companies.

I would like to ask the Minister briefly about the social fund. The social fund report from the Auditor General in the Northern Ireland Audit Office says that there were 1,901 cases of recoverable loans abandoned or impracticable to pursue. Why was that the case? The figure in the accounts states that the amount was £153,000. I would be the last to say that we should pursue people if they are

[Mr. Forsythe]

desperately in need of money and are deserving of it, but we should have an explanation as to why it was not possible to recover that money.

I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) about the disability living allowance. Nowadays, people suffer from new ailments and medical conditions which are not recognised by the medical practitioners who examine the applicants for the living allowance. That lack of flexibility should be considered.

The introduction of an identity card is an excellent idea. That little plastic card could carry a photograph and all the relevant details about an individual. Those in receipt of benefit could then take it to the post office for the purposes of identification. That would provide an excellent job for sub-post offices, which we are keeping. There is talk about the privatisation of the Post Office, but I know that we are keeping our sub-post offices. The card could also identify those who go along to vote, as that procedure is still subject to problems.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): The hon. Gentleman should consider going a bit further and having an identity card in Northern Ireland for all purposes, including voter identification. In the past there was a difficulty about the introduction of such cards, but now that we have all-party agreement on it and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), the Social Democrat and Labour party representative, is now in favour, surely its introduction would be a non-contentious issue on which the Government should move ahead.

Mr. Forsythe: I agree. It is an excellent idea. It is not a particularly difficult job to produce the identification details required; they could all fit on the back of the card, just like our Access cards. Now that there is agreement across the House on its introduction, the Minister should consider it. My colleagues and I would support its extended use.

Vote 2 for the Department of Economic Development covers tourism. The Minister had a little debate with my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East about the membership of the tourist board. He said that certain people were best suited to serve on the board and I would not disagree with that. I am not quite sure, however, whether there is an hotelier on the board. If there is no such member, perhaps that is why local business people who apply to the Industrial Development Board for help to build a hotel or complex are told that they cannot have one because the board will only give such grants to large hotel chains which come to Northern Ireland or to hotels associated with such chains. I am reliably informed that that is the practice, so perhaps the Minister will confirm or deny that when he replies. If it is true, it is disgraceful. We are talking about helping to attract people to Northern Ireland, and who better to do that than local people?

In connection with vote 1 for the DED, I congratulate the Minister, as I have done in the past, on the new investment and new firms that have come to Northern Ireland. I have seen the benefits of that in my own constituency and I welcome them. I know that the IDB has done a lot of hard work to attract such investment. As I have said on previous occasions, it is most unfortunate when the media choose to play down and, on occasion, attack certain investments which people have worked hard to get. I give a black mark to the media for talking down or criticising certain matters. My second criticism of the media is that when the IDB is holding confidential discussions the media tend to leak the fact that those discussions are taking place, with the result that others get to know about the matters in hand. That is unfortunate.

I disagree with the Minister's high praise for the Local Enterprise Development Unit. My praise for the IDB does not carry over to LEDU, because it is supposed to help and encourage local people by putting them in a position in which they can create more employment but, sadly, that is not happening. I am sorry to end my speech on that note, but it must be said.

9.10 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I welcome the finances that are rightly being given to the people and departments in Northern Ireland.

A number of the issues raised by hon. Members in a debate on the appropriations measure earlier this year have, unfortunately, not been dealt with. I trust that that will not happen tonight. Some hon. Members apparently feel that this debate is a waste of time. As happened in the past two important debates, one party is missing. Perhaps it feels that it can achieve better deals from Ministers outside the Chamber. It is about time that those who take the trouble to come to the debate and raise issues that are essential for their constituents received appropriate replies. The matters raised tonight are of grave importance to our constituencies.

Under the vote for the Department of Agriculture is the item "Castlederg Flood Defences". The estimate provision for 1994-95 is £16,000 and the amount to be spent in future years is £855,000. In winding up, will the Minister tell my constituents whether the amount to be spent in future years means directly after 1994-95, or will we have to wait before further money is spent on that item, which has been identified as of great importance for my constituents? It is important that it automatically follows on and that that money is spent to correct a matter that has caused great concern to many of my constituents, especially the owners of property and shops in the town of Castlederg.

Deep concern is still felt within the pig industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) rightly mentioned that prices have been better recently, but the industry needs the careful eye of the Government. An important part of my constituency's industrial community is Unipork in Cookstown. I am sure that the Minister knows that I welcomed the takeover of Unipork, and it was warmly welcomed in my constituency, but in several parts of the Province workers are deeply worried about their future and that of their employment.

I trust that the Department of Agriculture and Baroness Denton, who has that responsibility in another place, will keep a keen eye on that development. I wish Unipork in my constituency well; I wish the new firm and the people who run it every success. However, they should be keenly conscious of the people who have given excellent service to the pig industry throughout the years, whose rights must be guarded. I hope that the Minister will recognise that in her watching brief on development in the pig sector.

I shall now discuss the Department of Economic Development, and express my deep worry about what is happening in that sector. Will the Minister tell the House

the up-to-date position regarding ground intended for economic development that is owned by the Department throughout the Mid-Ulster area? Urgent Government action is needed in the industrial development of my constituency. We need to know the up-to-date position regarding ground in Omagh, in Cookstown, in the district of Magherafelt, which is shared between my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), and in Castlederg, an area of deprivation for many years. We are thankful that Castlederg is starting to come out of the doldrums, and that things are starting to appear much better for it after many years of terrible carnage and suffering, but we need to know the plans of the Department and the Industrial Development Board for the rest of my constituency.

Industrial development seems to be directed largely at certain areas. West of the Bann is identified as an area where industrial development is greatly needed, but I have studied the figures and I am worried. I hope that the Department is willing to investigate what has happened as regards industrial development. In the west of the Province, some areas outside the city of Londonderry—areas in my constituency, including the area verging Strabane, Omagh and Cookstown—have the greatest or second greatest unemployment in the entire Province. I believe that the Department must do more to ensure that industrialists come, because there is plenty for them to see that would attract them if they were brought into the area.

The IDB has done an excellent job and I join the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) in congratulating the IDB on the efforts that it and its chief executive have made. I appreciate their efforts and their work, but there must be greater incentives, and financial incentives, to encourage people. That is especially so given that the west of the Province is suffering because, while we are told of the great challenge of Europe, we lack the infrastructure to encourage the developers to come to the west.

Bearing that in mind, I naturally move to the vote concerning the Department for the Environment, and the essential part, which links with the Department of Economic Development. I ask the Minister to inform the House of the date of the commencement of the Cookstown bypass. We were visited by the Secretary of State, who has been visiting different councils and meeting councillors. He had a lunch and asked councillors, "What are the most important issues confronting your area?" That all sounds good, but in reality it is a public relations exercise. The Secretary of State raised the people's hopes.

I was at a meeting of industrialists, the elected councillors of the area, the schools and the rest of the community representatives. They were asked what they felt to be of vital necessity for the Cookstown area. The unanimous view of everyone present, who had been invited by the Secretary of State, was that essential to the development of Cookstown was the Cookstown bypass.

The Secretary of State—a Cabinet Minister; we could have had no one higher except the Prime Minister—visited the region and was interested in its needs and development. I thought that the most natural thing for me, as Member of Parliament, to do following the meeting which the Cabinet Minister attended, and where he listened to views with keen interest, was to send a letter asking when the Cookstown bypass would be built. We now have the vote and the details about the finances from the Department of the Environment, but there is no mention of the Cookstown bypass, not only in the plans for 1994-95, but under the heading of money to be spent in future years.

What were the dinner—where a unanimous opinion was given—and its costs all about? Surely there must be more behind them than just a PR exercise. On behalf of my constituents, I demand that the Government not only say that they will listen to the people but take action based on the unanimous view of the region's political parties, industrialists and educationists. That is, that the Cookstown bypass is vital for Cookstown and its future development in economic and industrial terms and within Europe. The project would not involve big sums of money, but, without it, the future of the industrial development of the region will be stymied.

In the light of the Secretary of State's visit and the great hopes raised in the community, I must ask when we will get the Cookstown bypass. The question may be regarded as a hardy annual by the Minister as I have asked it on numerous occasions, but the problem will not go away until action is taken. I want not a PR exercise, but essential action. I am delighted that Ministers come to the region to see what is happening. I am delighted that they come to see the deprivation and neglect in the west of the Province, especially in the regions that I have mentioned tonight. However, I do not believe that it gives the community any heart if visits are made, questions asked about the needs of the area and seeming promises are made that action will be taken by the Department, when they all turn out to be a damp squib. That provides no help to the community.

In my constituency, in Omagh the main A5 is recognised as a trans-European highway—not many places have such big names, and it is a wonderful thing in this age of the European Union. It sounds tremendous, but means nothing. It has been so designated by Europe, but in the vote I find nothing from the Government about the money that is to be spent on it. All that I can find is that £700,000 is to be spent on stage 2 of the Omagh pass, but without phase 3 of the development in Omagh and the rest of the road network, the other work will be useless. We need not only the designation of the trans-European highway, but action to be taken on it.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Londonderry, East will join me in saying that we still await the Magherafelt bypass, which is essential for industrial development. We cannot face the challenges of Europe without the tools to do the job. If industrialists come to the area and find that they have to sit in traffic jams—time is money to them—they will not wait around for long. They will pass over the area and go somewhere else with better roads. That does not represent a fair sharing out of the available finance. I speak for an area that has suffered greatly from the lack of money that should have been voted by the House for its road development and maintenance programme.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North and others who have described the deep frustration felt in the countryside about the planning process. I resent the idea that officials care more about the countryside than do elected representatives. That is designed to give the impression that the only people who want to protect our environment are civil servants and Government officials. As a former civil servant I might add that I care just as much about the environment and the countryside as a

[Rev. William McCrea]

Member of this House as I did when I worked in the Department of Health and Social Security—and I have remained both civil and a servant to this very day.

When a council gives its unanimous approval to some project, surely that ought to mean something. The tragedy is that, oft times, once a council has given its unanimous approval to a countryside development, officials say, "We have listened to your argument; we have consulted; we are still going to turn you down." This causes great resentment. It is no easy matter to get the unanimous approval of a local government institution in Northern Ireland: it is tough enough getting it in this House. Officials should not, therefore, give a development the thumbs down in the face of a council's unanimous agreement.

Will the Minister give his attention to those who have been battling to save the Ballynahone bog near Maghera? That may not sound particularly interesting to some, but the people of the area want it designated a site of special scientific interest—which it is. Recently, there was an application to rape the countryside around the Curran bog. The local community and their elected representatives made representations—the latter as the defenders of the community. Interestingly, the Department is giving the go-ahead for the rape of the countryside around the Ballynahone bog, and I feel that it should give my constituents' interests more consideration than that. I trust that the Minister will reply on that point.

I have already asked the Minister questions about the serious pollution in the River Mourne and the River Strule. There have been major pollution incidents on both rivers in recent times. Wood preservatives got into the River Strule and much of the fish life in the river was destroyed. It was a major pollution of the river. Water from those rivers is used for human consumption so there should be greater curbs on those using detergents and industrial chemicals.

Farmers have to install catchment tanks for effluent from their silo pits. If there is any seepage, the Department of Agriculture comes down heavily on the farmer—and rightly so because we must not allow pollution. There are frequent court appearances. Industry should be compelled to carry out similar environmental protection in the interests of wild life. Will the Minister tell us the up-to-date position on the restocking of the Rivers Strule and Mourne?

I have been contacted by the Ardstraw anglers' club about the proposed site for a hydro-electric generator at Spamount mills on the River Derg. The anglers are deeply concerned about that and made four points. The River Derg is not a large river and the volume of water required to run the proposed plant could ruin the entire stretch of water for anglers. They are worried about the turbine design. If it has high revolutions per minute, it will be lethal and will kill a large number of fish. It is crucial that measures are taken to ensure the survival of fish in our local rivers.

With the installation of a hydro-electric generator comes the necessity for a well-designed fish pass that will be inaccessible to poachers and will allow the passage of fish in low water. The hydro-electric generator will cause a large loss of fish in the River Derg. Will the operators contribute to a restocking programme to redress that loss? Perhaps the Minister could respond to that point.

I want briefly to draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to a number of other issues. Many people throughout the Province are concerned about the length of time that it takes the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to deal with the backlog of applications for grants. A constituent of mine applied for a grant a year ago, but he has only recently been asked for sketch plans. His application is still in the pipeline and little progress has been made. That is not a criticism of the Housing Executive; it is an appeal to the Minister to provide the finances necessary for it to employ the staff to process the applications quickly and to meet the costs of grants awarded.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South mentioned the sale of two-bedroom bungalows for senior citizens. That is of concern to people in my constituency. Can the Minister ensure that urgent action is taken on the issue of Melburn close and Melburn park in Cookstown? We need to money to uplift the environment and improve the houses on that estate. If the money could be made available, that would be deeply appreciated by the residents.

Will the Minister deal with the question of the provision of science laboratories? I received a response to that point from the Minister responsible for education, but there is urgent need for the new-build science accommodation at the Cookstown high school. I have been promised the provision of two science mobiles from September 1995, but given the finance available in education, action ought to be taken to meet that high school's urgent needs.

Mention was made of the Child Support Agency, about which there is deep concern in all parts of the House. One of my constituents was blamed for fathering a child but was totally innocent. An apology was finally offered but there was no recognition of the deep hurt and anxiety suffered by the families concerned. That accusation against a totally innocent man nearly smashed a marriage. He was sent a simple apology saying, "We're sorry this happened and will try to make sure that it doesn't happen again." Such an attitude is totally unacceptable and redress ought to be available to individuals who have suffered in that way.

It is time that the Child Support Agency devoted its energies to tracking down fathers who pay nothing rather than going for those who have consistently and honourably paid for their children's upkeep down the years and have never dodged their responsibilities. It seems that the CSA's efforts are directed mainly at fathers who are already paying, and it is placing an intolerable burden on them. I resent that, and so do my constituents.

There is deep concern in the Province and further afield about the rights of disabled people in employment. The Government must produce meaningful and appropriate legislation to tackle that issue. Pressure must be kept up and legislation put before the House quickly. If the Government acknowledge their responsibilities to the physically or mentally handicapped, such legislation will quickly be on the statute book. Without it, we will simply be listening to words, and the community will not forgive inaction in that regard. Handicapped people are getting a raw deal in finding a proper and appropriate place in society. They are one of society's most neglected groups. My colleagues join me in supporting action and legislation that will bring that iniquitous situation to a conclusion forthwith.

9.37 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It is a pleasure to note that the debate will be wound up by the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), because this morning I had the pleasure of welcoming him to my constituency and to Banbridge high school. As the Minister will appreciate, some of his comments on that occasion with regard to tonight's debate have proved most apposite.

It was a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman cut the sod for the new building at Banbridge high school. It was a most happy occasion. I am sure that the Minister appreciates that he will maintain his popularity in the area by also releasing funds for the school playing area that will be necessary when construction of the new building, which is on the site of the old playing field, is complete.

Schemes are going ahead in the rural part of Banbridge to amalgamate primary schools. Unusually, those schemes have the complete support of the local community, but there are financial problems—and they should be remedied as soon as possible.

It is a pity in some respects that the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and his party colleagues are not present this evening, because the hon. Gentleman had an interesting written question down last week, relating to the number of jobs promoted in each Northern Ireland district council area over the past 10 years. My eye naturally turned to the two council areas that comprise my constituency. I noted the healthy but not surprising figure for the borough of Craigavon, which has the second largest concentration of manufacturing industry after Belfast in terms of size.

My other council area, Banbridge, was a very different story. Over a 10-year period, the Industrial Development Board had promoted a total of 200 jobs—and it should be borne in mind that the IDB recognises that only about two thirds of jobs promoted are actually created. None of those jobs involved investment in the area. That is particularly annoying given that the IDB announced only a few days ago that it was abandoning proposals for industrial development to land adjacent to Banbridge's dual carriageway, which would, in principle, have been a very suitable site.

Mr. Stott: Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) have mentioned the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). He and the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon)—who are very good attenders of Northern Ireland debates—are not with us this evening because they had to give evidence to the Boundary Commission, which was doing its review today.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information. May I point out that the Newry inquiry is also considering the seat of Upper Bann? Newry and Armagh council proposes its division into two parts to form new constituencies. That merely reflects the view that hon. Members take of their priorities.

The figures that I cited—which were obtained by the hon. Member for South Down—relate to a 10-year period, and clearly demonstrate neglect on the IDB's part. I stress the word "neglect". Both the IDB and the Local Enterprise Development Unit seem to have a fixed state of mind: once they move south of Lisburn they can think only of Newry, forgetting about Banbridge on the way down there. Perhaps they think that Banbridge is a prosperous town, because it appears to be expanding; but most of the expansion is caused by people who are coming to live in a "dormitory" town, rather than to work there. It will not be healthy for the town's future if the population expansion is not matched by an expansion of job opportunities.

Other Government Departments, as well as the IDB, have neglected the town during the past 10 years. A number of public bodies used to have offices and employees there, but that number has diminished: Departments have been closing offices and moving them out, and the number of public jobs in the area has consequently declined.

Those issues need to be tackled, especially the issue of land development. As I said, the IDB was right in principle to consider developing land next to the dual carriageway. There were problems with the particular site involved, but others are available; they may be closer to Dromore than to Banbridge, but they are still in the Banbridge district council area. I hope that the IDB will deal with the position as a matter of urgency, so that we can have good-quality industrial development land in the district council area.

Let me deal more generally with issues involving the IDB and LEDU. There seems to be a certain inflexibility in the approach of the two agencies. For example, a firm in the Craigavon area has been a client of LEDU for some time; it is now thinking of expanding in a way that might make it more appropriate for it to become a client of the IDB, but there are difficulties in transferring a client from one agency to the other. LEDU is making difficulties about transferring the client to the IDB, although the size and development of the firm make the transfer appropriate. It is remarkable that these bureaucratic issues, which seem to be connected as much with the empire building of agencies as anything else, are acting in a disadvantageous way.

Inflexibility arises in another way. One valuable development in the Craigavon area has been the Craigavon industrial development organisation—one of the first local authority initiatives in this respect, which the Government are now encouraging. That is fine. It is a challenge to which Craigavon local authority has responded imaginatively, but it has not received a similar response from the agencies, in which I include the Department of Economic Development. They have their own settled patterns and a cast of mind which says, "not invented here". If they have not thought of the idea, they are reluctant to accept the thinking of other people.

We are trying to promote a Craigavon partnership, whereby the local authority's initiative can operate as an overall body to bring together the statutory agencies. We are not receiving the response from the statutory agencies that we should be. I hope that there will be more wholehearted co-operation between the statutory agencies and Department of Economic Development and local authorities engaged in such economic development.

A small example of such non-co-operation is that CIDO wishes to expand and have a third unit providing slightly larger accommodation—5,000 sq ft—in the Lurgan area. A private enterprise partner is prepared to put money into the project. The proposal has been with the statutory agencies for quite some time, but it is moving at a snail's pace. One almost feels that the agencies resent the initiative and drive that the local authority is showing. That is not an appropriate response or attitude for it to take.

Last week saw the first publication by the Fair Employment Commission of one of its affirmative action proposals. This is a matter to which I may return in the

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future, but I shall make a few comments on it now. The proposals reveal in clear terms a criticism that we have made of the FEC and of the fair employment programme, but which has been denied by Government—the concept of quotas. We said that legislation is heading towards quotas. The Government said, "No, it is not; we do not intend to have quotas".

Last week's publication contained six so-called affirmative action programmes of action that must be taken by an employer. The programmes are legally enforceable because the FEC is in a position to issue directions to the employer. The FEC has placed on the employer the requirement of achieving a certain percentage of applications and appointments. What is that if not a quota?

A quota cannot sit alongside the requirement of appointments being made on merit. There is an important issue of principle here. It is amazing to see a Conservative Government ignore this issue of principle, because were it to happen on their home patch they would take a different approach. There is a distinction between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome. It is right that there should be equality of opportunity, but nobody in his right mind thinks that, even where there is complete equality of opportunity, it will automatically and fairly result in equality of outcome in every place of employment. That is not to be expected. Talents and circumstances will vary and historical patterns will apply in various places. Equality of opportunity is one thing; equality of outcome is totally different.

The Fair Employment Commission, as announced by its chairman a couple of reports ago, has set itself the target of achieving equality of outcome in every place of employment in Northern Ireland. It has said that it is setting quotas for all those places. It does not initially set quotas for all of them, but if a firm comes to the FEC's attention or annoys the chairman in some way, he can bring the apparatus to bear and require people to enter affirmative action programmes. That can be backed up with statutory declarations and firms can be given a specific quota that they must achieve, with ferocious penalties to be applied if they do not achieve it.

The matter must be considered. A couple of years ago, the then Home Secretary, now the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a speech in the House dealing with questions of racial equality in England and Wales, stated that the Home Office had decided that it was not appropriate to try to achieve equality of outcome for ethnic minorities in England in all places of employment because of the problems to which that would give rise. Yet that is exactly what is happening in Northern Ireland.

It is only a matter of time before some of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities in England and Wales—the employment disparities for Afro-Caribbean people, for example, in England and Wales are just as great as, if not greater than the employment disparities in Northern Ireland—say, "Why are special measures adopted in Northern ireland, but not in England?" It is only a matter of time before they say that the reason is that nobody is shooting people or letting off bombs on the issue in England. It is then only a matter of time before thoughts move further among disadvantaged people in England and Wales. The Government need to think about the matter more clearly. One cannot corral the issues into Northern Ireland and expect them to have no application in equivalent situations elsewhere.

I have criticised the concept of quotas. Even if one accepts quotas, one has to say that the Fair Employment Commission in Northern Ireland is applying the quotas in a dishonest and unbalanced manner. I take as an example one of six firms—a bakery in Castlereagh; I am not sure whether it is in Belfast, East or in Strangford. The FEC has set a quota for the firm by reference to its catchment area, or what it takes to be the catchment area. It has taken the area of the city of Belfast and the district council of Castlereagh. It has looked at the people who are economically active in those areas and has found out that there is a certain percentage of Catholics. It has then set a quota with reference to that figure. That is a dishonest way in which to proceed.

The firm is situated in Castlereagh in east Belfast, and the bulk of the employees are drawn from east Belfast. Is east Belfast taken as the catchment area? Oh no. The catchment area is broadened to include north and west Belfast, where there are very few employees. If it is broadened to include north and west Belfast, why not broaden it on the other side to include North Down and Ards? Geographically, they are no further away. In terms of communications and in terms of journey time, they are closer. In terms of human, social and geographical factors, they are closer than west Belfast. It is a question of sauce for the goose and sauce for the gander. It is a question of adopting a consistent approach. Such an approach has not been adopted in this case, and that is why I say that the matter is dishonest.

The quota system is unfair in the way in which it operates. I take the example of a firm called Quinns in Fermanagh. The employees are predominantly Catholic and there are only a handful of Protestants—1 or 2 per cent. A quota has been set for that firm. It has been told that it must achieve a target of 12 per cent. of applicants and appointees. I am quoting from memory, so I may not have the figure exactly correct. It is not clear how that figure is arrived at. In what the FEC takes to be the catchment area of Quinns, 45 per cent. of those who are economically active are Protestant, yet the quota is 12 per cent., not 45 per cent. Why?

The third example is a firm in my constituency. The catchment area, as determined by the FEC, is 40 per cent. Catholic, so the quota is 40 per cent. Catholics. Why is there a disparity between that firm and Quinns? There is something unequal. In the six cases, there is a pattern of inequality in the FEC's approach. I fear that it is an issue to which we shall return again and again. As I have said, a wrong approach, in principle, has been adopted. Not only is it wrong in principle, but it is being carried out in a dishonest manner.

I am using the word "dishonest" deliberately. I am not saying that it is by mistake or through negligence, but that there is malice involved. I make that reference knowing full well the personalities involved. That issue, especially with regard to fair play, is one that I may develop again on another occasion.

Mr. William Ross: When my hon. Friend is detailing the different approaches used by the Fair Employment Commission, he neglects to mention that, in my area, it leaves out of the reckoning those people from the Irish Republic and elsewhere in the British Isles who are

employed by firms such as Quinns, organisations such as the Western health and social services board and many others.

Mr. Trimble: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct. Those issues are left out. There are many more things that one can say. The statistical basis on which the Commission is operating is inaccurate because it is drawing from figures relating to the number of persons employed and unemployed in some areas, which we know are not accurate, especially in the rural areas and close to the border.

Anybody who has had any dealings with the issue knows that the two greatest elements which affect economic activity and which are most likely to create a black economy are agriculture and the cross-border areas, where many people take jobs in one jurisdiction and claim benefit in others, or engage in activities such as smuggling. In certain areas, the employment statistics are not reliable. At a firm not very far away from Lurgan in my constituency, the management in a previous dispensation were in the habit of laying on a bus on Fridays so that the workers could go down to Newry to claim benefit. Of course, they no longer have to claim in person, but that is a different issue.

I shall move from the issue of the Fair Employment Commission to something that falls directly within the scope of the Minister: arts policy and matters related to cultural traditions. My hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) also touched on that issue when he referred to the local government legislation and the provision for street names in Irish. I wonder how many of those street names in Irish will be in Ulster Gaelic, or whether they will be in the dialect of Gaelic taught in certain schools—a modern invention based on what is thought to be the Gaelic spoken in the centre of Ireland.

Those who have studied the area know that there are three different forms of Gaelic spoken on the island of Ireland. The schools and others who are promoting the so-called Irish language in Northern Ireland today, under the aegis of the Minister, are not promoting Ulster Gaelic. One wonders why that is so. Most people who are involved in its promotion are perhaps not aware of the distinction between Ulster Gaelic and the Gaelic spoken in the centre of Ireland. Ulster Gaelic is on the borderline between Scots Gaelic and that spoken a bit further south.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: The Minister would be fully aware of Scots Gaelic.

Mr. Trimble: Of course the Minister is fully familiar with such matters, in which I hope he will take a keener interest.

Returning to arts, cultural traditions and so on, I am disturbed by the policy papers being produced by the Arts Council. It seems to be recognising only what it calls a classic tradition and an Irish tradition in the arts and related matters. Where is the British tradition? The classic tradition, as it recognises it, refers to certain forms of high art. It also recognises what it calls an Irish culture and supports certain forms of cultural activities in the broad sense which are passed off as being Irish. Where is the British in that?

The Minister will also be familiar with the pipe bands association. I am sorry to say that, in the recent world championships, the Ulster pipe bands were temporarily demoted from their dominance of pipe-band playing. They will be back. The Field Marshal Montgomery pipe band will be back, I am quite sure, as the champion of champions, having being the champion of champions for many years and having lost it only this year.

The Minister cannot fail to be aware of the number of Scottish pipe bands that exist in Northern Ireland and the high level of activity in them. Has the Arts Council ever recognised it? Does the Arts Council recognise it? Has it done anything to promote that aspect of popular culture?

Anyone who goes around our towns, particularly on a Friday night, cannot help but notice the large number of band parades that take place. That is another clear demonstration of popular culture. Thousands of people are involved in musical activity in connection with such bands. The Arts Council will not support pipe bands, which do not fall within its concept of classic culture or Irish culture. Something is being left out. That reinforces the unease that many of us have felt about the Arts Council and other cultural traditions in Northern Ireland in recent years. We feel that the Arts Council does not reflect what most people want and do. It reflects only certain aspects of culture as a result of pressure generated sometimes by pressure groups within Northern Ireland and sometimes by pressure groups outside.

Time is moving on. I should like to make a few brief comments about some of the points that have been made by other hon. Members. Some references have been made to transport matters and in particular the transport links of the northern corridor through Belfast, Larne and Stranraer to Carlisle. The Minister will know that we return to the issue again and again because it is tremendously important to the Northern Ireland economy. We are distressed at the number of occasions when people give public support to a different corridor which will not benefit the Northern Ireland economy so much.

We appreciate the help that we are beginning to receive from the Scottish Office in representations to Europe about the northern corridor. I only wish that the Northern Ireland Office was just as vigorous on that matter and, in particular, took account of the disadvantage that we suffer because we are not eligible for funds from the cohesion fund. We know that the rules of the European cohesion fund cannot be changed. We do not qualify for cohesion fund moneys, but the southern corridor does. Consequently that part of the country will be able to invest to the disadvantage of our major outlets. What does the Northern Ireland Office propose to do to rectify that imbalance and ensure that the northern corridor and our major outlets of Belfast and Larne are not placed at a disadvantage, especially in view of the effect that that will have on our economy and on unemployment?

Planning has been mentioned in the debate, as it has in other debates. I find myself in fundamental agreement with the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) on agricultural occupancy conditions. The conditions restrict the occupancy of certain of the properties in the countryside which are subject to them to persons who are wholly or mainly employed in agriculture or were last so employed.

The important point is that, given that farming units in Northern Ireland are much smaller and that half the people who own farming units work only part time, to what extent is it reasonable to draw the agricultural occupancy condition so tightly that the person has to be wholly or mainly employed in agriculture? Particularly as changes take place in agriculture and the income derived from it

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diminishes—as it will as the years go on—an agricultural occupancy condition restricted to people mainly or wholly employed in agriculture is too tight.

It might be more appropriate to restrict agricultural occupancy to people who have a genuine connection with the countryside and a bona fide reason for living there. The conditions must be more flexible. The Department can do something about that immediately. It does not require legislation. It is a matter of policy and the way in which the agricultural occupancy condition is framed.

Mr. William Ross: Considering what my hon. Friend is saying, and as the Government are pushing the whole question of diversification, surely it is feasible that anyone who is involved in such diversification fails to qualify.

Mr. Trimble: I take the point that my hon. Friend makes. If we have a more flexible approach, and if the occupancy condition relates to people who have a genuine connection with the countryside and a good reason for living there in terms of family connection or whatever, that would take care of the problem. I am not arguing for the removal of agricultural occupancy conditions entirely.

There was a time not long ago when the planning service was rather lax. It was granting permission under the exceptions to the rural planning policy and not attaching an agricultural occupancy condition to it, and the temptation to make a quick killing by selling the property to persons who did not have a connection with the countryside was too great. I agree therefore that there must be some form of condition, but it must relate to the circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland, in social terms and in terms of farm size.

I shall make one further point on this matter. As many people wish to live in the countryside, not necessarily in individual farm dwellings but certainly outside towns, I am sorry that the planning service has not given more thought to creating new villages in the countryside. If new villages were created, it would help to absorb some of the demand that has been generated by persons not connected with the countryside who want to live in a more rural environment.

There are places where new villages would have developed if there had been no planning controls. I can think of one area in my constituency adjacent to the shores of Lough Neagh. If there were no planning controls, a village would be beginning to emerge naturally in that area. Planners are trying to prevent those natural developments from taking place through planning controls. Is that desirable? We should have a slightly more imaginative approach on that issue.

10.6 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I defend the right of my colleagues on both sides of the House to pepper the Minister with every sort of problem on every vote contained in the Northern Ireland estimates, which are effectively the appropriation order. However, I shall concentrate my fire on one matter.

In that, I have the pleasure of directly following the issue raised by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) about planning. I know that, if the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) were here, he would be assenting as well, because it is an issue that he raised during the debate on the previous appropriation order, when he emphasised the considerable frustration of people with the planning service.

Before I refer to that matter, I must endorse the remarks made by the hon. Member for Upper Bann about the Full Employment Commission and its behaviour with so-called goals and timetables, and the total inconsistency of the way in which it applies the legislation, which is sometimes little short of a personal vendetta for those who do not toady to the chairman of the Full Employment Commission. We shall come back to that issue.

I shall not follow the hon. Gentleman down the road of the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit. I shall keep my powder dry on that matter, as the Select Committee is presently examining it.

I raise these issues because, by and large, if I can get a satisfactory response from Ministers on matters of constituency interest, I do not feel that it is necessary to bring them to the attention of the House. I find that Ministers are helpful in dealing with those issues, and I rarely find it necessary to bring a grievance to the House.

There is a major problem affecting the borough of Castlereagh, part of which is in my constituency of East Belfast, part of which is in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), part of which is in the constituency of Strangford and part of which is in the constituency of North Down. Not only was the borough divided so badly. Back in the early 1980s, when my party was in control of the council, we had to adopt a recreation policy for the whole of Castlereagh.

We looked around, and we did not have to look much further than neighbouring Belfast to see the folly of building conventional leisure facilities which cost ratepayers millions of pounds. In Belfast, some £8 million is spent in leisure services on facilities which are duplicated on street corners all around the city and which cost considerable amounts to run. There is a limited clientele for those facilities and, while we have excellent leisure facilities, they are all of the same kind throughout the Province, and they are competing for the same market.

My colleagues and I concluded that it would be sensible for us to look for a niche which was not being catered for by other councils and one which, in financial terms, would do more to pay its way and attract larger numbers of people. We proceeded on the basis of a development at Dundonald, which was to have been the Dundonald international ice bowl. The property was to contain an international-sized ice rink, ten pin bowling, children's play centres, a laser area, restaurants, and function suites for all sorts of recreational activities.

A tourist park was to be built outside the facility, which was to include a large man-made lake with boating, sporting and wildlife aspects. There were to be tennis courts, a golf course, a driving range, camping sites, an hotel, a cinema and other facilities and provisions.

We approached the Department of the Environment, which was having none of it. We were told that, if we wanted to proceed with the scheme, the normal 75 per cent. grant which was being accorded to all of our sister councils across Northern Ireland would not be accorded to us, because it was more of a commercial enterprise. The council, rather than burdening the ratepayers with a provision similar to that which everyone else had done, decided to go it alone. In doing so, the council knocked on the door of Europe, seeking funding on the basis of providing tourist facilities in Northern Ireland.

In 1985, the council was successful in being offered a grant of £4 million for the provision, and it was agreed with the European Community that the scheme would proceed in two phases. The first phase opened in 1986, and has returned a trading profit every year since. It has made a trading profit of about £1 million in a period when some £50 million was lost in Belfast on leisure services.

In terms of our intention to save ratepayers money and provide new facilities, it was a success. But the problems started to occur when we attempted to fulfil the remainder of our obligation to the European Community following the building of the leisure park provision. First, we submitted our case to the Belfast urban area plan hearings.

Hon. Members from outside Northern Ireland may not be fully aware of the planning restrictions in Northern Ireland. District councils are not capable of giving themselves planning approval: they must go to the Department of the Environment and put in an application like everybody else, whether it is for an extension to a garage or whatever.

The Department of the Environment decides on those issues after consultation with the district council and following the normal public consultation process.

We put in our planning application to the 1998 Belfast area hearings. Everyone had the opportunity at the public hearings to argue for or against the proposals. When the Belfast urban area plan 2001 was issued, I was pleased to note that the planning commissioners, who had listened to the evidence, and the Department of the Environment and its then Minister, supported the second phase of Castlereagh scheme. We therefore felt sure that everything would move smoothly from then on.

Full of enthusiasm, as soon as the Belfast urban area plan came out, we immediately got our architects and consultants to prepare the easiest of the schemes, so that we could start immediately. We planned to follow up with the rest of the scheme while the first phase was proceeding.

The Department of the Environment, however, refused to accept it in that manner, and stopped us immediately proceeding with the scheme. At considerable cost and effort, it required us to undertake the lengthy process of bringing in all our consultants to submit the entire scheme in one go. We sought to accommodate the Department, and withdrew our planning application for part of the development, in deference to the advice that it had offered to us.

The consultants were brought in and asked to work up the entire plan. We then had detailed consultations with all the Government agencies concerning road services and relevant environmental issues, and had discussions with the planning department and whomsoever. We assumed that, once we had given the Department of the Environment, to its satisfaction, the details that it had requested on various matters, the rest of the process would be a simple one.

We did not take into account the fact that, regrettably, a local government election was in the offing. The local Tory party, which had no other policy that it felt would be attractive to the ratepayers of Castlereagh, sought to make an election issue of the theme park. It did so in an attempt to generate some publicity for itself and to create noise far greater than its strength in the area. As a result, the Department of the Environment ran scared and called for a public inquiry.

It might be worth noting that the local government election gave its own verdict to those Tories who had led the campaign—most of them lost their deposits, and all were rejected by the electorate. Not one of them was returned to the council.

The public inquiry was held on 5 January 1993, but up until this moment, we have still not received an answer as to whether approval has been given. The development would bring literally thousands of jobs to Northern Ireland, both in the building industry as the project proceeds and in the services industry when it has been constructed. The issue is of considerable importance in terms of employment and in terms of the finance from Europe. As I said, we had support from Europe in grant aid, part of which we took up for the first phase of the development, while the rest is still sitting there.

We subsequently received a letter from the Minister responsible for the Department of Economic Development. He is also, peculiarly enough, the Minister responsible for the Department of the Environment. Wearing his DED hat, the Minister told us that, if we had not completed the theme park by 31 December 1994, the grant would be withdrawn. At the same time, wearing his Department of the Environment hat, the Minister is refusing to give an answer to our planning application so that we can proceed.

We cannot win until the Minister sorts himself out. I do not ask him to act on the planning application and the report, which he will by now have received from the planning commissioner—who, in the middle of the process, had a heart attack but, happily, is now back at his desk. That added further delay to the process.

I simply ask for an expeditious response from the Department to the Planning Appeals Commission report. It is essential that we have that immediately if we are to have the least chance of meeting deadlines set by the Minister under his Department of Economic Development portfolio.

We also ask the Minister to be flexible in terms of that deadline. We need a speedy response from the Department of the Environment's planning service to the reserve matters that must be dealt with, for the whole matter must be dealt with in a few months' time. That does not mean that the £30 million to £40 million development must go up within that time, but enough of it must go ahead in order that we receive EC funding.

First, we need a speedy response to the planning application; secondly, we need flexibility in terms of the deadline; and, thirdly, we need some movement from the planning service to help us get speedy approvals for the reserve planning issues.

If the Department of the Environment planning service is considering planning legislation, and a new draft order is in the slips, will it deal with some of the issues which it has failed to deal with thus far? The first concerns ex post facto planning applications, an issue which I have raised it in the House before.

Northern Ireland now has almost an epidemic of people who start construction—even of housing estates—and put in their planning applications afterwards. They reckon that, once the construction is there, it will be difficult for the planning department to demand that it be knocked down, which gives them the edge with their application.

I suggested to the previous Minister responsible for the environment that a possible solution was to institute a penalty system for those forced to put in a planning application after construction had begun. I suggested that the cost of an ex post facto planning application should be 10 times as much as a normal one. That could amount to a considerable sum for those who breach the law on major

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housing developments and other aspects of construction. The new order, when the Department eventually gets round to it, should consider that issue.

Another issue which the Government should deal with, either through the new order or through regulation, is what I would call an anomaly whereby a privileged position is given to those involved in agriculture. I do not argue against that, but those involved in equestrian sports and rearing horses should be entitled to the same planning leniency as those directly involved in agriculture.

Equally, those involved in tropical and ornamental fish do not have the same privileges as those involved in the farming of other fish or in agriculture. The same encouragement should be given to them as is given to those directly involved in farming.

I support the view that has been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House about reform of the agricultural occupancy conditions. As mine is a suburban constituency, several of my constituents have expressed anxieties about that. The Department must consider the issue.

I also think that the Department must bring into law, as opposed to general precedent, a right of appeal for objectors, and an entitlement to neighbour notification. During those glorious days of the Northern Ireland Assembly, from 1982 to 1986, the Environment Committee, of which I was Chairman, made a recommendation to the then Under-Secretary of State, who is now warming himself in Hong Kong, to the effect that people should have the right to neighbour notification—that they were entitled to know if someone intended to build close to their home or business, so that they might be properly consulted and have the right to object.

We went a step further than the Department eventually did; we asked not only that they should be written to directly, but that what are termed "planning poles" should be erected on the site—I think that some Scandinavian countries do it—so that not only the people who live adjacent to the place where the building will be erected, but the people who use that area, can see that there is an intention to develop a piece of ground.

I would ask that, instead of that being done as a matter of precedent in the Department, where it is not required by law but is done by the grace and favour of the Department, it be brought into an Order in Council, so that it would be a legal right on which people could rely.

The same is true of the right of appeal for objectors. It depends on the grace and favour of the Department whether, if two thirds or more of a district council supports objectors to an application, the matter can go before a public hearing—what is now in article 30 in the new planning order. I ask that that be part of a new planning order, instead of just a general regulation in the Department.

I trust that the Minister will consider those suggestions, which, speaking as one who is involved at the grass roots with planning issues, would do much to take away some of the frustration that many of us feel in knowing what is needed in our areas but having bureaucrats tell us what is good for us.

I have no axe to grind against the people who are involved in the planning department. I recognise that they have a difficult task, and that decisions have to be taken. But, like every other hon. Member who has spoken about those planning issues, I do not believe that enough account is taken of the people who live in the areas, those who are involved on the ground and those who represent the people on the ground. If the planning service is supposed to be a service, who is it servicing if it does not recognise the wish and the will of the people?

10.27 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This debate, like all the other debates on the appropriation orders, allows hon. Members from Northern Ireland to develop the discussion involving their constituents and their constituencies. Because circumstances permit, the 10-minutes rule on speeches does not apply and therefore the debate has widened into a discussion of many aspects that are of importance to Members when considering an appropriation order.

I draw the attention of the House to the part of the schedule of the order that refers to the Department of Economic Development, because a great deal of taxpayers' money is allocated in the order for the purpose of industrial development and the creation of jobs. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), in opening the debate for the Opposition, expressed anxiety about and dwelt at length on the subject of unemployment.

I received in the mail a copy of the front page of the *Carrickfergus Advertiser* of 15 June 1994. The report states that the new mayor, Sam Crowe, is asking for the Prime Minister to intervene over the proposals by the Northern Ireland Office to close the commercial activities of the Carrickfergus harbour. I understand that there has been significant and lengthy exposure on the future use of the Carrickfergus port.

I also understand that one reason why the town's mayor wrote to the Prime Minister was that the Department of the Environment has issued a vesting order on the commercial land and has given the port users until the end of July to vacate the site. Employees at the port have been put on redundancy notice. The problem in Carrickfergus has been intensified because of the order issued by the Department of the Environment.

Those job losses come on top of other recent major job losses in the region. We must ask what the Northern Ireland Office is thinking of to allow vesting orders to be imposed on commercial land, driving businesses away from the township. It appears to outsiders that the Department's economics is that of the madhouse. That seems to be an apt description of the Department of the Environment—jobs are being lost because of the dogma attached to the closure of the commercial activities at the Carrickfergus port. I thought that when the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) was developing his argument about the port he would refer to that subject because of the significance to it of the order that has been issued.

I understand that there have been discussions on the subject over a long period. When the alterations to the town map for the 1988-95 period were being considered, the problem was discussed. There was also a significant discussion on the port's future at a public inquiry in November 1992 on the Carrickfergus maritime area. There was a recent debate at a meeting of the Carrickfergus town council. A report on the debate was sent to me. A motion

was put before the council to rescind a previous decision agreeing to the closure of the commercial industries in the region.

One councillor mentioned the issue of abandoning the harbour. He said that councillors had once again been misled when they were told that from 1 July all operations on the commercial harbour would cease. He said that the harbour was not part of the hinterland and that commercial activity should be retained at the harbour. When the debate was winding down an alderman asked the town clerk to seek legal advice from the town solicitor on the consequences of voting for a rescinding motion. He concluded:

"I am distressed and very annoyed about the redundancies. I work with unemployed people every day of the week and I see the ravages of unemployment. It is the scourge of the nation when people are made redundant."

This sort of involvement by a whole community goes to show the depth of the concern felt about unemployment, the loss of revenue to the area and the lost job opportunities that ensue.

Carrickfergus harbour has been the backbone of the town, and one can understand the worries about the consequences of redundancies for the community. It is now accepted that mistaken decisions have been taken over the past few years. They should be analysed and reviewed. Redundancy and its causes should not be taken lightly by Ministers, and they should now review the planning approvals given in connection with the drawing up of the town map.

On behalf of the locally elected representatives, business men and trade unionists of the town, I ask the Minister to consider withdrawing the vesting order to allow me, and other interested parties, to discuss the matter with him so that a full investigation can be launched into the whole affair of the Carrickfergus port.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) referred to the water supply in parts of his constituency. Earlier, I questioned the Minister about what is happening to the water industry in Northern Ireland. I would be interested to know how much is being spent on privatisation, for instance. Problems with water supply and sewerage systems should be given a much higher priority than privatisation.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) discussed the housing situation. The last time we debated an appropriation order I dwelt at some length on it too. The situation has not improved much since then. More resources still need to be channelled into providing new homes, improving existing stock and accommodating the homeless. I hope that the Minister will pay serious attention to what the hon. Gentleman had to say on this subject. Northern Ireland still has a significant need for more housing.

Finally, the hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) raised the issue of health and social services. I appreciate that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has an Adjournment debate on this very point tonight, and I do not want to take up time that he could spend developing his theme. I would, however, draw attention to a press statement issued by the Civil Liberties Council on 9 June relating to the issue on which the hon. Member for North Down spent his entire speech: the closing of homes for the elderly. Who is responsible for closing old people's homes? Is it the health and social services board or the new trusts? The hon. Member for North Down put the blame on the new trusts. If that is the case, why do they not carry out reasonable and proper consultation with all those involved? One of the problems is that people are not aware of what they are entitled to or of the consultation procedures that should be adopted.

The Minister should investigate the reasons for the lack of proper consultation. Perhaps he would give the new trusts some guidance to ensure that before they make a decision they consult those who will be the victims of that decision.

What sort of animal have the Government introduced with the new trusts? The hon. Member for North Down accepted that they are bodies with no responsibility to the community, are unfair and undemocratic, yet they decide the destinies and quality of life for many old people in their areas. Will the Minister listen to the Northern Ireland Council for Civil Liberties on this and other matters involving community care?

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is developing an important point about the unrepresentative character of the trust boards. Does he appreciate that exactly the same point can be made about the area boards, which are equally unrepresentative?

Mr. O'Brien: That point has been raised in previous debates on appropriation orders. It is true that the health and social services board is in the same category. New quangos are being introduced. The Government should accept that they were wrong when they set up the health and social services board. They should have included some system of democracy when setting up the trust boards. I dwelt on the issue of the trust boards because I share the concern expressed by hon. Members about what is happening to old people's homes. There is a need for the greater involvement of local people who are answerable to the community. Until that happens, the issue will be raised in every Northern Ireland debate in the House. Unfortunately, many people will suffer in the meantime.

I ask the Minister carefully to consider the points raised by many hon. Members. Action needs to be taken on a number of issues, and especially on the question of old people's homes and the Carrickfergus port. I hope that the Minister will accede to some of the points raised tonight.

10.43 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): I shall deal first with the last point raised by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) about where the final decision lies. I do not want to pre-empt my answer to the Adjournment debate or to the points raised about the Banks residential home. However, my noble Friend Lady Denton must endorse any decisions. She made it clear that she has visited or will visit the homes concerned and will weigh up all the information that she receives before making up her mind on the closure proposal. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that my noble Friend is most sincere in giving that undertaking.

Tonight, as usual, we had an interesting debate. I was sorry that, yet again, the Liberal Benches were empty. The Leader of the Liberal party tells us of his interest in Northern Ireland, but when we debate the nuts and bolts of how Northern Ireland works the Liberal Bench tends to be empty. We all regret that and a number of comments have already been made which I do not intend to take up.

Mr. Peter Robinson: How is possible for the Minister to admonish absent Liberals without admonishing absent SDLP Members?

Mr. Ancram: That matter has already been raised. It was dealt with and an explanation was given by the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott). Members of the party to which the hon. Gentleman referred normally attend such debates. I was making the point that, despite the fact that the Liberals purport to have an interest in Northern Ireland, the Liberal Bench tends to be empty on these occasions. I am sure that that is of great regret to all hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said that I would deploy a Noah's flood of answers in responding to the debate. His analogy may have been wrong. I feel more like a cork floating on the flood of points that emanated from speeches made tonight. I shall deal with as many as possible, but if I fail to deal with a particular point I will—as is traditional—arrange for the hon. Member concerned to receive a letter from me or from the Minister responsible.

It is important in a debate such as this that Northern Ireland Members have an opportunity to raise matters of concern to their constituents, as was done tonight. When I wound up the last appropriation order debate, I remarked that it remained a matter of sadness to me that the public hear not a selling of Northern Ireland—persuasion that Northern Ireland is a good place to live, invest and create jobs—but almost the opposite. The nature of the process is such that we tend to talk Northern Ireland down. I say to all hon. Members who quite rightly raised the question of unemployment—which I shall address in detail later—that if we are serious about attracting investment and jobs to the Province, we should remember that we do ourselves no good by continually describing Northern Ireland in the somewhat lurid terms used in debates such as this.

I begin by putting myself forward as the salesman for Northern Ireland and placing one or two important points on the record. Northern Ireland's economy is growing faster than the national economy. We did not hear much about that tonight, but it is a fact. Seasonally adjusted unemployment has fallen in eight of the last nine months. The Industrial Development Board has come in for compliments and criticism tonight, but it had considerable success in attracting inward investment over the past two years, and it made a promising start this year. That is all building towards the sort of jobs that we are looking for in Northern Ireland.

As to agriculture, income from farming increased 17 per cent. in real terms in 1993, which must be welcomed. The sum of £5 million was made available for rural development—£2 million more than last year, which reflects the importance of trying to develop the countryside for the benefit of the whole of Northern Ireland.

I will deal later with the specific points about housing, but the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's gross resources in 1994-95 are £522 million, which is £17 million more than last year—not a reduction, as was suggested. The number of unfit dwellings reduced from 11 per cent. in 1987 to 8 per cent. in 1991. That is good news for those who live in houses in Northern Ireland and for those whom we are trying to attract to Northern Ireland. Per capita spending continues to be substantially higher than nationally, at £788 in 1992-93; the UK average was £586. That, too, is to be welcomed.

Health and social services have also come in for a good deal of comment this evening. Spending has risen by 37.8 per cent. in real terms between 1980-81 and 1994-95. This year, £1,293 million will be spent on hospitals, community health, personal social services, trusts and family health services—a 6.8 per cent. increase on last year's spending.

While making valid points about problems in their constituencies, Northern Ireland Members must not lose sight of what is good in Northern Ireland, or of the continuing need to put that message across. Ultimately, that is more important to the development of the Northern Ireland economy and to Northern Ireland jobs than many of the other matters that we discuss in debates such as this.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Minister's defence of the Government's policies, but does he accept that people are not in a position to hear that sort of good news in tonight's debate because the task of Northern Ireland Members is to draw attention to areas which still need improvement? Outside the House, we certainly present a positive image of Northern Ireland, but it is the Government's job, not ours, to defend their record tonight.

Mr. Ancram: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but it is not just a question of defending the Government's record; it is a question of pointing out that many good things are happening in Northern Ireland. We all want to say that, and it is my responsibility to put it on the record now. We have heard a good many gloomy stories about the Province this evening.

I come now to the specific issues that have been raised. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), intervening in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, pointed out that the number of "pure" holiday visitors to Northern Ireland had doubled in the past five years. One in five visitors is now a holidaymaker. Of the 1.26 million visitors to Northern Ireland in 1993-94 —that figure was mentioned earlier—250,000 are "pure" holiday visitors. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel that he can work on those figures in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) raised the question of the links between the Republic and Wales, and whether they were receiving more favourable treatment from the European Community than the Northern Ireland-Scotland links. In the first instance, it is for the EC to decide what types and levels of funding are made available to member states under the structural funds; it is then for each member state to decide how to allocate the resources thereby made available. So far, projects to develop links between Northern Ireland and Scotland have benefited considerably from EC grants, and have remained competitive with links between the Republic and Wales. I hope that that will continue.

The hon. Members for Wigan and for Antrim, North both made important points about unemployment, to which I referred earlier. I recognise the seriousness of unemployment in Northern Ireland, but I am pleased to note that the unemployment figures for May 1994 show a decrease of 1,000 on the previous month, and of 5,400 on May 1993. The seasonally adjusted total has fallen for eight of the past nine months; in January it fell below 100,000 for the first time since July 1991. Although there is no room for complacency, it is important to note that the trends are moving in the right direction, particularly in comparison with those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Wigan mentioned the long-term unemployed. As he knows, there are a number of programmes that demonstrate the Government's anxiety to deal with the problem—action for community employment, the job training programme and Enterprise Ulster. All those are being used in the attempt to make inroads into a serious problem.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned inadequate funding for community care reform. Again, I think it important to put on record that the Government have made substantial allocations of additional money for that purpose. In 1993-94, the boards were allocated £29.45 million, of which £24.63 million was transferred from the social security budget to spend on the new arrangements. A further £41.22 million has been allocated for 1994-95, and £35.34 million will be allocated in 1995-96, bringing the total cumulative additional money for community care to £106 million. In the light of what has been said, it is important to register that point.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North made a large number of points, and although I may not be able to deal with them all I shall try to deal with some. Like many other hon. Members, he raised the issue of rural planning. The objective of the Department of the Environment's rural planning strategy is to assess and balance the need for development of houses and jobs in particular areas against the need to protect and conserve the environment within that area. It aims to match development to rural settings with the right design and has been generally welcomed. Although some people are unable to build houses in the countryside—they tend to be the ones that, inevitably, we hear about—it is worth pointing out that on average 78 per cent. of planning applications submitted each year for development in rural areas are approved. Although we hear some of the difficult stories, a much more balanced picture appears when we look at all the statistics.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: I assume that the Minister does not take into account the number of inquiries that are made and the fact that the planning department advises applicants that they need not make an application because it will be refused.

Mr. Ancram: I am sure that the hon. Member will agree that in planning terms it is dangerous—I speak from a certain amount of personal experience—to consider only inquiries, which can be made on a number of levels. It is important to look at the number of applications, which shows an applicant's seriousness, compared with the number that are approved—the vast majority.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North asked about training in Northern Ireland. The allocation to the Training and Employment Agency in 1994-95 is £203 million, compared with £193 million in 1993-94. Allocations to all major training schemes have increased. We are concerned to help as many young people as possible, and those figures fly in the face of some of the suggestions that have been made tonight that training resources have been reduced.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North raised the question of the Springvale campus. The Government have made it clear from the outset that we shall consider any case put forward by the university, but a decision will take into account an examination of the implications for the higher education system in Northern Ireland as a whole, the impact that the scheme would have on the regeneration of the north and west Belfast area and an assessment of the public expenditure implications, given the current limitations on available resources. A number of the concerns that the hon. Member raised will be considered by the Government.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) covered a number of points which had been mentioned by other hon. Members. In particular, he raised the issue of Irish street names. The removal of the prohibition on non-English street names is part of the process to achieve a more open and tolerant society and is a practical manifestation of the Government's recognition of cultural diversity. It should not be seen as a forerunner to bilingualism. It will be for councils to decide whether to erect dual language street names, but if they do, one name must be in English. There is an obligation on councils to take account of the views of occupiers in the street before deciding whether to put up a street name in a language other than English.

The hon. Members for Londonderry, East and for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) raised the disturbing question of the water pollution incident on the River Stroule. This has been a matter of major concern. The Department of the Environment is continuing its preparation of a file to send to the Director of Public Prosecutions, with a recommendation to take legal proceedings in relation to the spillage of the wood preservative which gave rise to the incident. That shows the seriousness with which the Government regard that problem.

Mr. William Ross: Surely there is a split personality in the Government's approach? They say that we must integrate everybody, make everybody like each other and become more like each other, and create a more homogenous society; yet they then promote two totally different cultures and always talk about two different communities. Will they make up their mind one way or the other?

Mr. Ancram: When the hon. Gentleman is next in Scotland, he might go to look at Skye, where he will see examples of signs in Gaelic. They were introduced some time ago as a recognition of cultural diversity. We should not be afraid of cultural diversity.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East raised the question of rare illnesses and has written to me about that. He also mentioned the particular case of students. Like others, students may be eligible for income support, notwithstanding the absence of a prior contributions record. That remark is in line with the letter that I wrote to him recently on the matter.

The hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) raised the question of the Banks home. I know that he has raised it on a number of occasions and that he always speaks with great feeling and great eloquence on the subject. I am certainly aware of the strength of feeling in North Down and in the House. I assure him that my noble Friend Lady Denton is fully aware of the concerns. If the trust decides to close the home, my noble Friend will be asked to consider and endorse the decision. My noble Friend has agreed to meet a number of delegations of interested parties and she has also signalled her intention to visit this and any other homes to meet residents and to listen to their views, which is a point made by the hon.

[Mr. Ancram]

Gentleman. No doubt we shall return to the issue again in the Adjournment debate a little later. I wish to make clear to the hon. Gentleman my noble Friend's intention.

I also put on record my rejection of the comments of the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) during the speech by the hon. Member for North Down. People who are appointed to serve on boards and trusts face many difficult choices and decisions, and they do so in the wider interests of all the people in the area. They have a difficult job and I believe that we should recognise their public-spiritedness rather than criticise their efforts to serve their communities.

Mr. William O'Brien: Given the Minister's description of the trusts, will he explain why the home's residents were not consulted, advised and given all the information before the decision was made?

Mr. Ancram: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will attend the Adjournment debate. I do not want to pre-empt what I shall say then. This is very much at the heart of the matters that will be raised by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). I think that we should await that debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the Minister agree that when a home is to be closed, it is malpractice for civil servants to tell people, "You had better put your name down for a home convenient to this one; if you do not do that now, you will be shifted 10, 20 or 50 miles away from where your people visit." That happened in Broughshane in my constituency, when the Minister's predecessor told me that the home would not close until he met a deputation, yet it was closed before the deputation could meet him.

Mr. Ancram: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that my noble Friend Lady Denton has fulfilled all her commitments to meeting delegations of people. The hon. Gentleman paid a kind tribute to my noble Friend, for which I was grateful. She has said that she will meet delegations and listen before she comes to a final decision. I should leave it at that because she has to make a difficult decision. She has made it clear that she will make it in the light of comments.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) raised the question of the health service and transport in the rural areas of his constituency and the constituency of the hon. Member for Antrim, North. The provision of hospital services to people in the glens of Antrim has not deteriorated as a result of the transfer of acute services from the Waveney and Moyle hospitals to the new Antrim hospital. Travelling time to the hospital is longer, but the time taken to reach a patient in a emergency remains as before. A very wide range of out-patient clinics is provided at the Waveney and the Moyle. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), the Under-Secretary of State, will shortly be meeting representatives from a number of councils in the area to discuss road access. My noble Friend Baroness Denton has always made it clear that she is keen to hear concerns about health matters generally.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South also raised the question of Orlit houses. I understood that he and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) were keen to meet my hon. Friend and I shall pass that request on to him and, in any case, I shall write to the hon. Member for Antrim, South about the matters that he raised. He also raised a specific question about the pension rights of employees in the case of privatisation of Northern Ireland airports. It is not intended that the rights of members of the pension scheme, whether current or past, or the assets of the scheme will be affected in any way by privatisation. Privatisation of the ports is being discussed tomorrow and I hope that the position on that can be clarified at that time.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster raised a number of points, many of which, again, were covered by other hon. Members, but he raised the question of Unipork in particular. As he knows, its operational control was taken over by Bridgewater Food Holdings plc. The business, which represents a major part of the Northern Ireland pig industry, has suffered considerable financial losses in recent years. A restructuring plan is currently being prepared by the new owners in an attempt to achieve ongoing viability. The eventual configuration of the business will not be known until the completion of that plan. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster also raised the question of flooding in Castlederg. I can confirm that financial approval has been given to the proposed scheme to provide flood protection on both sides of the banks of the Derg.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann raised the question of fair employment. I must begin by responding—

Rev. William McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ancram: Of course.

Rev. William McCrea: While appreciating the time that the Minister has at his disposal, there are a large number of other matters which have been raised and there are certainly other matters which have not been raised. For example, the hydro-electric matter in my constituency was raised and there are other major matters of concern. Will we get detailed replies on those through the post?

Mr. Ancram: I told the hon. Gentleman and to other hon. Members at the beginning of my winding-up speech that, on any matters which I do not cover now, I or my hon. Friends or my noble Friend will write to hon. Members. In cases where a matter has been raised by a number of hon. Members, I shall ensure that the reply is made known to them all.

I am trying to deal with what I believe to be the important issues raise and an important assertion was made by the hon. Member for Upper Bann on fair employment. I shall begin by refuting his allegations of dishonesty. The recently published report of investigations into six companies which the Fair Employment Commission commenced under section 11 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 found three firms to have employed too few Protestants and three firms too few Catholics.

The affirmative action agreed with all six firms—they were on both sides of that particular problem—included encouraging applications from the under-represented communities, each company's advertisement welcoming applicants from the under-represented communities, effective action to maintain an environment free from harassment and equal opportunity awareness training for all employers. While scales and timetabling have been agreed, it is unrealistic to believe that an exact balance can be achieved, reflecting the overall balance of the Northern

Ireland working population. I heard what the hon. Member had to say and as it is detailed and complex issue I will, if I may, write further to him on that matter.

Finally, I come to the point raised by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). He raised the question of planning applications. I shall, of course, bring his comments about the need for an early decision on the planning application in Castlereagh to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield in his capacity as Minister with responsibility for the environment. Likewise, I shall draw to my hon. Friend's attention the other detailed points which were made about the planning process, which were shared by other hon. Members from Northern Ireland.

Mr. William O'Brien: I shall make two points. In the opening statement, when reference was made to the question of expenditure on the water and sewerage service, I asked if it would be possible to give information as to what is being spent on the privatisation of the water services and there was a suggestion that we might hear that information before the end of the evening. Has the Minister any views on the Carrickfergus port?

Mr. Ancram: If I may, I will take that matter to my hon. Friend the Minister and write to the hon. Gentleman. I will also write to the hon. Gentleman about the water privatisation proposals and put the reply in the Library. Proposals have been made about expenditure to ensure that in the coming years there is a sufficient water supply to meet the needs of Northern Ireland. That is the most important point and the point at the bottom of the question that he asked. I can give him detailed figures on that. If I may, I will do so in writing.

Mr. Stott: I apologise to the Minister for not raising this issue when I spoke earlier. On page 7 of the order £220,000 is allocated to the Northern Ireland assembly. Is that estimate included with a view to any progress that may be made in the talks in which the Minister is currently engaged? If he does not want to answer that question now, perhaps he will write to me about it.

Mr. Ancram: I will certainly write to the hon. Gentleman. He should not read into that figure any hidden or unsubstantiated agenda that I am not prepared to talk about tonight. I suspect that the figure reflects the ongoing costs of preserving the current position. I will write to the hon. Gentleman and make it clear.

As I said at the beginning, while the Government listen to the legitimate points that have been made by hon. Members tonight, it is important that we do not lose sight of the work and commitment that the Government put into Northern Ireland. I listened tonight to many people saying that in some ways the Government did not recognise the needs of Northern Ireland and that Northern Ireland was underfunded. I leave one thought in the minds of hon. Members tonight: in terms of overall expenditure, Northern Ireland enjoys a lead of more than one third above average United Kingdom expenditure. That reflects the Government's concern about the problems which exist in Northern Ireland. That concern is real and it will continue. I commend the order to the House.

Ordered,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 25th May, be approved.

HEALTH

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Bates be discharged from the Health Committee and Mr. Jonathan Evans be added to the Committee. —*[Sir Michael Neubert, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ordered,

That Jane Kennedy be discharged from the Social Security Committee and Kate Hoey be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Michael Neubert, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS

Ordered,

That Mr. Kevin Hughes be discharged from the Select Committee to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords as the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills and Mr. Stephen Timms be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Residential Homes (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

11.11 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I was interested in the Minister's comments in the earlier debate. He accused us of not talking up Northern Ireland. It is because we are concerned that the high quality of care manifested in Northern Ireland may be hindered by some policy changes that I am delighted to be able to have this Adjournment debate tonight.

At the outset, I should say that I share the tributes that have already been paid to Baroness Denton. She is one of the few Northern Ireland Ministers in my experience over the years who listens rather than using that lovely old English phrase, "I hear what you say," which means, "I am not listening at all and I am certainly not heeding what you say."

We are equally aware of the constrictions that are placed around a Minister. I had the unhappy experience of dealing with a civil servant who was advising a Minister about housing in my constituency. He said that there had never been houses in that area on that road. Thankfully, one of the delegation had the Ordnance Survey map of the year of my birth, which showed houses on that road.

I am happy to bring before the House some of our anxieties arising out of the closure of residential homes by the Eastern health and social services board. I welcome the opportunity to raise the matter, because it has immediate implications for the area that I represent. It also has widespread ramifications which will affect people not only in Northern Ireland but in Great Britain. Perhaps a cautionary word should go out to the planners: people may not be in the fortunate position of being able to pay for their own care in latter years. We are all getting older and the lifespan for many appears to be increasing. In 30 to 40 years, today's planners could be those requiring care. Therefore, we should all be guided by the principle: "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you".

As a convinced supporter of community care and care in the community, I have never seen them as cheap options. I certainly take issue with national health service planners who seem at times to be using the elderly as pawns, and I object most vehemently to money mattering more than people.

The background to the debate concerns the Department of Health, which has stated its intention to increase the number of elderly people aged over 75 having their long-term needs met at home, rather than in residential care, nursing homes or hospital settings.

Accordingly, the Eastern board has targeted a reduction from the existing provision of 1,823 independent homes and 394 statutory homes to 1,296 independent homes and 303 statutory homes. In south and east Belfast, growth in the private sector was encouraged by the Department and boards, but now many such homes are under threat. However, the real sufferers are elderly people who believed that their latter days would be spent in the settled home of their choice.

Significantly, south and east Belfast have twice the number of over-75s and over-85s as the other three community units of the Eastern health and social services board.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree that the rigidity of the decision-making by the Eastern heath and social services board about residential homes has been completely unacceptable to the residents, staff and communities concerned? Will he join me in urging the Minister and, indeed, Baroness Denton to tell the board that it must take into account the wishes of the communities concerned and start thinking about people, rather than only targets and beds?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the hon. Lady's contribution. She was concerned about the situation in Northern Ireland, and travelled to Belfast at the weekend to discover first hand some of the issues affecting the staff, residents and carers. I share her views about the rigidity of the decision-making.

I shall turn to the criteria that were set to evaluate options. They were, first, the fabric of the building, including costs and suitability for its purpose—although so used for some time—secondly, the standards set by the Registration and Inspection Department; thirdly, the current demand and vacancies; fourthly, the running costs; and, fifthly, the locations within the area. The board added further criteria after discussion, including interest shown by the number of people attending meetings and the comments made. Presumably that took cognisance of the residents' views.

I give that only by way of background, as the issue is much wider. There is a difference in the national health service between the regions. In England, there is an obligation on local authorities to spend 85 per cent. in the private sector. In Scotland, there do not appear, as yet, to be clear guidelines. In Northern Ireland, however, it appears to be purely a numbers game, in which the target calls for 12 per cent. to be catered for in the independent sector, and only 2 per cent. of the elderly to be catered for in the public sector.

The rigidity of the formula does not allow for proper transitional arrangements. People, not beds, would be a better starting point, especially where it was admitted that it would be cheaper to keep open Ardview house in Ardglass.

Community care, as I understand it, should be offering choice, but instead, this chimera is offered. However, those in residential care are offered no choice. Surely there should be a transitional period. Those coming newly into care could have an informed choice and know what their options are, while those already in care should be left to finish their lives in peace.

In 1989, more than 88 per cent. of over-75s lived at home. By the end of 1992, that had fallen to an estimated 82 per cent. I suspect that that was because the Department and the boards were pushing for private homes to be developed. The 1992-1997 strategy document sought to increase that percentage again to 88 per cent. by 1997. However, it would appear that, whereas the Department set a period of five years for the adjustment to take place, the trusts have drastically reduced that to two years.

There does not seem to be any logical basis for the policies being adopted, other than a headlong rush to save money. The Banks home, which has been referred to this evening, has been described as "beautiful and convenient", Ardview as "beautiful but not convenient" and Cairns

house as "old and adapted". Old See house is a comparatively modern, purpose-built building. All are scheduled for closure.

As I have watched not only in the Eastern board area, but also elsewhere in Northern Ireland, it would appear that monetary pressures have led to decisions being taken on the hoof without proper principles or discussions occurring. It is suggested that choice is offered, but no choice is given, because prior decisions have been taken. There can be no useful participation, since the beds are being drastically reduced. Support for residents is being eroded as they are being removed from their areas. The vaunted principle of consent is being denied.

The Minister will be aware that, in exasperation at the way in which they have been treated, legal challenges have been made. I ask the Minister tonight for a clear commitment that there will be no further closures until the issues have been resolved. I do this insofar as the board was challenged in court, and it would seem to me that the incoming community trusts should have been included with them as correspondents.

In fact, in a letter from the Central Services Agency legal eagles dated 13 June 1994, the planning department of the board—in reference to the Banks and Cairns judicial review—were advised:

"it is no longer of any consequence and should not hinder any decisions being taken in respect of these two homes."

On the other hand, I draw the Minister's attention to the remarks of Mr. Justice Kerr in the High Court in May, when he suggested that it might be better to take no action on closure until the legal issues were resolved.

May I set out some of the disappointments which have already surfaced? While an advocacy service was promised, the residents had to push for it. The Friends of the Banks had to apply for it on 24 May. That was already on the late side, as—I am sure the Minister will agree—an advocate should be there at the beginning before battle lines are drawn and before the board or trusts decided on closure. The principle of advocacy is one which I, and I hope all reasonable people, support. The advocate should be there, not merely to listen, but to challenge the case for closure.

What has happened has been to some degree a travesty. The system does not appear to be independent, since the board appoints. Nor has it acted as a proper advocate. In the case of Banks, the advocate appeared to cobble together an arrangement. In Cairns and Old See, I admit that the co-operation was better. However, both sets of advocates ultimately relied on grants from the Department, and were not participating in the decision-making process. What plans does the Minister have for taking the process forward positively?

I contend that elderly citizens would appear to have few rights, and professionals can steamroller decisions which are made before any consultation process has been reached. I am not unmindful that options can be studied, but if they are not put forward for rational discussion, we are left only with a charade.

That was clearly illustrated in the decision by the Southern health and social services board to close Moylinn in Craigavon. The decision was announced to the residents on 7 July 1993 by the general manager of the unit, although the consultation period was to have commenced in September 1993. It would appear that the board had already decided to close Moylinn and transfer the residents to the new Fold home in Lurgan.

With a clever display of casuistry, it was argued that the board did not decide until later. It is not surprising, therefore, to read Mr. Justice Kerr's view:

"For a consultation period to be meaningful or worthwhile, the body conducting the consultation as a preliminary to making a recommendation must at least be prepared to change the view which it had formed before the consultation took place".

That is what any reasonable person would expect.

Sir William Wade put it well in his sixth edition of " Administrative Law":

"Where there is a statutory duty to consult persons affected, this must genuinely be done, and reasonable opportunity for comment must be given".

When other depositions highlighted that the Fold housing association had acquired the site of the Manor house in Lurgan for £4,000, when a similar property opposite was sold on the open market for £150,000, serious questions must be asked. Why shut so many homes, yet subsidise a new one? Was Moylinn really not suitable?

I should like to refer, finally, to a particular constituent, Miss K. G. Faris, now living in Ardview house. The Down-Lisburn unit of management has decided to close it on the issue of accessibility. Only two letters were written on that issue, however, on behalf of the same resident in St. John's house, Downpatrick. Is it not significant that one of those was written by a civil servant working for the Department at Dundonald house? I understand that the noble Lady Baroness Denton has had a letter on the subject, naming the writer.

Furthermore, it seems that Ardview will be shut, but then used as a facility for mental health and disability programmes. Although I recognise that there may need to be rationalisation as well as development of such services, is it just coincidence that the principal social worker who was responsible for the unit's residential homes for the elderly is now director of mental health services for the Down-Lisburn trust?

Although I could enlarge even more on the concerns expressed not only by residents and carers in the Eastern board, but by those even further afield, I will rest my case, so that the Minister is able to respond. If he cannot, I hope that Baroness Denton will exercise her manifest concern and restrain the headlong rush for closure in the statutory sector and show caution in the face of undoubted pressures that have appeared in the independent sector as a result of the strategic changes.

To change the metaphor, we should be wary, or else the chicks, or perhaps the old broilers, will come home to roost.

11.27 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on obtaining this important debate. I am grateful to him for raising the question of the closure of residential homes by the Eastern health and social services board.

My noble Friend, Baroness Denton, who has responsibility for health and social services matters in Northern Ireland, has asked me to say that she is particularly conscious of the anxiety felt by those frail elderly people who are accommodated in the homes that have been marked down for closure. She has already visited one of those homes at least and has spoken to the residents and carers. She has undertaken to visit all homes

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

that are referred to her for consideration. On her behalf, I welcome this opportunity to make clear the Government's view on the rationalisation of residential homes.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the new community care arrangements were anticipated in the 1990 policy document, "People First". The new arrangements recognise individual needs and incorporates a proper needs assessment, which allows programmes of care to be individually tailored to suit the needs of the individuals and their carers. That is a most important concept to which the Government are fully committed. As a direct consequence of it, it became necessary to review the level of residential accommodation in the Eastern board area.

The Department of Health and Social Services' regional strategy for 1992 to 1997 requires boards to ensure that the service provision in the community is adequate to meet the assessed needs of the elderly population aged 75 and over who wish to stay in their own homes. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the majority understandably do.

Trusts and directly managed units have responded to the new arrangements and are putting in place the essential range of home care, respite care and other non-residential services that will provide the necessary support for people who chose domiciliary care in preference to residential care. In most instances, people prefer to remain in their homes provided that adequate support is available. That fact is borne out by the figures. Of the 5,900 care packages agreed up to the end of last year, 50 per cent. were domiciliary based; 30 per cent. required nursing home care; and 20 per cent. were in residential care homes. It is clear, therefore, that as an increasing number of people choose to remain in their own homes, boards will have to develop and improve packages of care available in the community.

Some of these services will be provided by non-statutory agencies, which demonstrates the achievement of another essential element in the Government's community care policy—the need to develop a mixed economy of care by encouraging providers from the voluntary and private sectors to take on a greater responsibility for the provision of services.

We place great emphasis on the assessment process, which involves listening to people, and on the development of additional packages of care provided by a range of providers in the community. A framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the new arrangements has been put in place.

It is important that the hon. Gentleman should recognise that the provision of more services in the community has not been stimulated by a desire simply to cut costs, because care in the community is not a cheap option—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) may laugh, but it is certainly not cheap. In bringing forward those reforms, the Government are responding in a sensitive and flexible way to the needs and wishes of individual clients and their carers. The Government recognise the importance of properly financing those reforms and have transferred responsibility form the social security system to the health and social services boards.

Money has followed that move. In 1993-94, almost £30 million was transferred; that increased to more than £70 million in 1994-95. In 1995-96, £106 million will be available to boards for the development of community care services. Those sums, together with the resources which boards were already expending on community care, represent a substantial commitment to that important group of people.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way if I have a little time before the end, but I want to deal with some of the points which the hon. Gentleman raised.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that my noble Friend and I understand the fears of elderly and other vulnerable people and their carers about the level of services available for them. However, what I have said already should go some way to allay those fears and I think that I have demonstrated that every care has been taken to safeguard that vulnerable group of people.

Far from being a threat to the welfare of the elderly and others, the new arrangements are designed to add security and quality to their lives and, wherever possible, to enable them to remain active and part of the community in which they have lived, in some cases for many years.

Attention has rightly been drawn to the sadness that can arise when an elderly person is required to move from a residential home that is to be closed, but the most traumatic move for people is when they have to move from their family home into residential care. There are few instances when such a move is welcomed and many people worry about the prospect of moving away from their familiar surroundings for months before the move takes place. The families of the elderly person also find this move traumatic and are often heard to say that they feel guilty because they cannot care for their elderly relative at home. The policies which we are now implementing aim to delay that move for as long as possible.

I hope that what I have said helps to put in context the background to the present review of statutory accommodation. As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, with a diminishing demand it is no longer appropriate to maintain the present levels of residential accommodation. It is clear that fewer residential and nursing home places will be required in future. If we do not rationalise the overall number of places, two things will happen.

First, many high-quality, well-run independent homes will be faced with closure as the diminishing need for residential accommodation is met entirely by the statutory sector. We should not run statutory homes that are not being used to full capacity, and therefore trusts and boards will be forced to abandon the non-statutory provision in the first instance. We also know from experience that it is more expensive to maintain people in statutory homes than in the private and voluntary sectors, and by moving the balance of care towards statutory homes we would be failing to make the best use of available resources.

Secondly, the need to maintain excess accommodation will delay the implementation of improved community care services by reducing the resources that boards can move into their wider community care programme. In order to accommodate a few deserving people, we would be reducing the level of community services available to many more.

If I may discuss the specific points relating to the Eastern health and social services board, it has considered nine homes for closure, and a full round of consultation has now, I understand, been completed. It was the board's

intention to ask my noble Friend to endorse their decision. However, the process has been complicated by the judicial reviews that have arisen from the consultation about some of the homes. In the time since the board began the consultation exercise, the homes have become the responsibility of the newly formed trusts. It will be necessary therefore for the trust boards to consider each closure and to decide if they wish to proceed before Baroness Denton is asked to endorse their decision. That means that the local provider will be, and must be, directly involved. The exceptions to that rule are Warren house, Drumlough house and Ardview house as the decision to close those homes was taken by the board before the judicial review was requested.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, Mr. Justice Kerr, in his ruling on 31 May 1994, rejected the application. The case for closure of those homes has been passed to my noble Friend and it is her intention to meet as many as possible of those people who have asked to speak to her about the closures. She will also visit all the homes and will weigh up the arguments before coming to a conclusion. I am sure that she will also wish to read what the hon. Gentleman has said here tonight. She has already visited Ardview house. She wishes to reach a decision as quickly as possible so that the uncertainty can be removed and, where it is decided to close a home, so that the people concerned can be carefully relocated and begin to build a life with new and old friends without the uncertainty.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman still wishes to intervene.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I look forward to specific answers to the points that I have raised, but I raise one more. The figures that the Minister gave about people going into homes would have left 20 per cent. to be accommodated in homes for the elderly, yet the target is 12 per cent. in the private independent sector and 2 per cent. in the public sector, so 6 per cent. are unaccounted for.

Mr. Ancram: I shall draw that point to the attention of my noble Friend and ask her to write to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he will appreciate that the decisions that she has to take are not easy. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that she will make them with concern for the residents as the priority in her agenda.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman can also appreciate why it is necessary for the rationalisation programme to go ahead. It is not a thoughtless dictate, designed to reduce costs or deliberately to close down good-quality, well-utilised homes for elderly people. I understand how difficult it is for the people who are directly affected by a home closure and I give the hon. Gentleman a guarantee that no existing resident of a home that is to be closed will be forced out into the community.

We recognise that most people who have moved out of their own homes are happy with the type of care that they receive. We know that those homes are now their homes, and fellow residents in a sense their family. We shall deal gently with those people who are to be moved, and we shall give them a choice of alternative accommodation, taking into account groups of friends who would like to stay together.

Trusts will provide an independent advocacy service to ensure that the residents and their families are provided with the full information about the options available to them. The service will collaborate with trusts and units to ensure that the needs and wishes of residents are being considered. Existing residents will be accommodated in other homes just as good as where they live at present. My noble Friend Baroness Denton will keep a very close watch on this programme.

Hon. Members will be reassured to know that the figures obtained for the first nine months, from April to December 1993, show that the assessment and care management processes are coping very well. During that period, boards received 6,600 referrals for care management and carried out more than 5,900 assessments. The split of assessments completed between programmes of care was 73 per cent. elderly, 9 per cent. mental health, 8 per cent. mental handicap, 8 per cent. physical and sensory disabled and 2 per cent. other adult client groups. More than 90 per cent. of the assessments commenced within seven days from referral and at least 80 per cent. of assessments were reported to have been completed within a week. That major achievement has resulted from meticulous preparation by both Government and boards.

It is also important that we keep a close eye on the standards that we have set for access to, and the delivery of, care. If people wish to remain in the community it is important that we have in place high quality services to support their choice. In September it is our intention to undertake a detailed inspection of the assessment process. The focus of that inspection will be to seek to establish that local assessment arrangemments have embraced the priniciples that underpin the community care changes.

The Eastern board has made substantial progress in the development of domiciliary care schemes. The board offers a wide range of facilities for respite, including residential and nursing home care, day care and various forms of sitting services. I hope that the new arrangements for that care will be generally welcomed for their flexible response to an invdividual need. While understanding the deep concern of those affected, I also hope that I have managed to persuade the hon. Gentleman tonight that we have the interests of the residents in those homes at heart.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at nineteen minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Training

1. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current percentage of people who undertake training for work who subsequently find employment.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Hunt): Thirty-seven per cent.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his reply. From my inquiries locally with the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council, it appears that the figure for young people in my constituency is higher—but it is the percentage of people who actually complete training courses. Is it not time that the Government did more to ensure that young people and those in training for work schemes complete their courses? They would then have a far better chance of obtaining employment.

Mr. Hunt: I agree. I share the hon. Gentleman's pleasure at the fact that in the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC area the rate is higher for those who have completed training for work—it has risen from 40 to 44 per cent.—and I congratulate all those involved in the TEC on having done such a good job. Like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome the fact that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by more than 10 per cent. since December 1992.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the 70,000 youngsters who take part in the modern apprenticeship scheme each year get the best and most relevant training for work and stand a high chance of securing good employment thereafter?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. The target of increasing from about 12,000 to more than 70,000 the number of youngsters each year who achieve national vocational qualification level 3 will provide a substantial number of youngsters to fill the skills gap at craft, technician and supervisory level. That is important for our economy as we continue to try to be as competitive as possible.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Are not a number of training providers highlighting a growing trend, in that the proportion of the budget allocated to direct training by each TEC during recent years has been declining because the TECs have to fund a number of other schemes and, unfortunately, a number of them are spending money on administration? Will the right hon. Gentleman look at their budgets and ensure that a higher proportion of money goes to direct training rather than to other areas?

Mr. Hunt: I constantly seek to encourage a dialogue between the local Member of Parliament and the local TEC on what should be the local priorities. I do not want to prescribe, in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests, more and more of the budgets. I want to find a way to remove some of the existing restrictions to give more flexibility locally. Although the hon. Gentleman did not say so, I know that he will be pleased that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 16 per cent. since December 1992.

Sex Equality Branch

2. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the priorities for the sex equality branch of his Department.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): The branch works to further the Department's key objective—to promote equality of opportunity for women in the workplace and beyond.

Mr. Bayley: What help can the Minister offer my constituent, Mrs. Susan Craven, who was sacked by her employer Securicor after working as a cleaner at Queen Anne's school in York for eight years? She was sacked in the 34th week of her pregnancy because she was admitted to hospital with complications arising from the pregnancy. She has been offered a new job on lower pay and with no holiday or sickness entitlement. When will the Government's sex equality branch take real action to provide equal employment rights for women?

Miss Widdecombe: My first advice to Mrs. Craven would be to see what representations her Member of Parliament could make. I have received no representations from the hon. Gentleman that would enable me properly to investigate the case. Instead of raising the matter in the most public and superficial way, perhaps he will write to me making a proper representation so that I can then make a proper investigation.

Mr. Marlow: If the Equal Opportunities Commission did not exist, no Conservative Government would conceivably set it up, so will my hon. Friend get rid of it? There is enough feminist claptrap around without the taxpayer having to pay for this nauseating, sexist institution.

Miss Widdecombe: I must disappoint my hon. Friend. We have no plans whatever to abolish the EOC; rather, we welcome a closer working relationship with it, as evidenced by the recent fair play initiative.

Ms Eagle: Does the Minister agree that one of the best things that the sex equality sector of her Department could

do is to consider the provision of universal child care so as to allow women with responsibilities for looking after children to go out and work if they chose?

Miss Widdecombe: Child care provision is already increasing in just about every category. There is increasing day nursery provision, and increasing provision by registered child minders; there is also the Government's initiative to provide £45 million, through the training and enterprise councils, for after-school child care. The Government are addressing child care issues. Why do we never hear Opposition Members welcome those increases?

Training

3. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to extend the training for work programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Training for work helped 294,000 people in England last year, which is over 20,000 more than originally planned.

Mr. Brandreth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that unemployment has fallen yet again in the city of Chester? It is 6 per cent. lower than it was a year ago, and 35 per cent. lower than it was seven years ago. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the view on the ground, and particularly that of CEWTEC—the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral training and enterprise council—that the training for work programme has had an important effect on employment, especially in regard to those with disabilities and learning difficulties?

Mr. Hunt: I agree. The most important feature of training for work is that more than 85 per cent. of the client group are long-term unemployed. It is a very important programme, and has had a remarkable impact.

Like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the work done locally. We share the same training and enterprise council, which is coming up with imaginative and exciting new ideas. I also pay tribute to the Employment Service, which places a substantial number of unemployed people in work. I believe that in Chester nearly 7,000 unemployed people have been placed in work over the past 12 months. I commend all who work in the local jobcentres for that remarkably good result.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Secretary of State read a very interesting letter written by Mr. J. H. Pitman and published in the heavy dailies a few weeks ago concerning deficiencies in Britain's training programmes? Has the right hon. Gentleman asked to meet Mr. Pitman to discuss his concerns?

Mr. Hunt: No, I have not. Inquiries are taking place, and the hon. Gentleman knows that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has asked on several occasions for anyone with evidence to come forward. As for the letter, I shall study it again and come back to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Heald: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Hertfordshire not only has unemployment fallen by 12.5 per cent. in the past year, but we have seen a tremendous result from the youth training guarantee? Delays have been reduced from 108 to just six in the past year. Does that not show that young people in Hertfordshire are being given a far better chance than ever before?

Mr. Hunt: I agree. We must continue to present young people in Hertfordshire and elsewhere with an increasing range of opportunities. The new modern apprenticeship scheme will be at the heart of the Government's strategy, and our recent announcement that the opportunity to take part in the scheme is to be extended beyond 16 and 17-year-olds to 18 and 19-year-olds is an important step forward.

Trade Unions

4. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning this year's re-registration of trade union membership; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): If the hon. Gentleman's question is about check-off, various representations have been received.

Mr. Barnes: My question is about registration and re-registration by trade unions and trade union members. Is it not time that some deregulation was introduced for our trade unions? Why do they have to jump through so many hoops in terms of their existence and organisation and in terms of being recognised and negotiating? And why is the Minister so vindictive towards railway signalmen, who all do a far more responsible job than he does?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is out of sorts with the times and his potential party leadership. Gone are the days when the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) used to describe ballots as

"a scandalous and undemocratic measure against the trade union movement".—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1983; Vol.48, c.210.]

It appears that the hon. Gentleman has not caught up with the movement in his own party. The Government spoke for the British people and the vast majority of trade unionists when we reformed the trade union movement and gave it back to its members.

Mr. Jenkin: Although unemployment has been falling in the North Colchester constituency, the registration of trade unionists has not been one of the factors which may have assisted that. However, employers are worried about the succession of European Court cases that have been lost by the Government. Does my hon. Friend agree with the Prime Minister that we need to look at the way in which the treaty of Rome is operating in this area with a view to reform in 1996?

Mr. Forsyth: As my hon. Friend knows, I always agree with the Prime Minister, particularly on that point. On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, there is a link between falling unemployment in his constituency, as in every other, and our trade union reforms. It is because of our trade union reforms that we have been able to create a climate which has attracted 40 per cent. of all inward investment into the European Community into Britain, thus creating jobs.

Unemployment

5. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures in the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Hunt: Seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment fell by 20,100 last month to 2.661 million.

Mr. Greenway: My right hon. Friend has already acknowledged the success of training and enterprise councils, based as they are on local initiatives supported largely by local businesses. Is he aware that the North Yorkshire TEC, which was four years old last Friday, has already helped more than 12,000 individuals and firms, helping many of them to get back into work? Does not the success of that initiative give the lie to the Labour party's claim that the Government are doing nothing about training?

Mr. Hunt: I join my hon. Friend in commending his local training and enterprise council. I know of North Yorkshire TEC because my hon. Friend has just sent me a copy of its annual report which highlights a range of exciting and imaginative initiatives. Also, it is well known for its high-powered marketing approach and the way in which it extends the hand of help to so many in my hon. Friend's area. I commend the way in which he is working so closely with his local TEC.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister accept that there is not the slightest reason for complacency on the part of the Government as regards unemployment? Far too many people, certainly in the west midlands but also elsewhere, suffer the appalling indignity of not being able to find work, with a substantial number having been unemployed for longer than 12 months. When will the Government recognise the injustice, indignity and humiliation suffered by people without employment and try to get the figure down to at least the level that existed when the Tories took office in 1979?

Mr. Hunt: Why does the hon. Gentleman not take pride in the fact that since December 1992 unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 12 per cent? I, too, take pride in the fact that over the past 18 months unemployment in the United Kingdom has fallen by more than 300,000 while in the rest of Europe it has risen by more than 1.5 million. Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that our policies are working and that we have 70 per cent. of our working age population in work, which is one of the highest percentages anywhere in Europe?

Mr. Alan Howarth: Given my right hon. Friend's personal commitment to ensuring improved employment opportunities for disabled people, will he examine the difficulties that training for work procedures entail for small specialist providers of training for disabled people? In particular, will he consider the possibility of providing regional budgets for disability training with a view to reducing the time, effort and cost involved for trainers and for training and enterprise councils in the present fragmented system?

Mr. Hunt: I will continue to look at that problem as I want to ensure that all training and enterprise councils put equal opportunities and opportunities for disabled people at the top of their agenda. The Employment Service leads by good example: it sets a target on the number of disabled people to be placed in work, which is then divided among all the areas. In the next 12 months, the service aims to meet its national target of placing 55,000 disabled people in work and it is confident of achieving that.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Secretary of State explain why the Treasury's summary economic forecast, published today, states that while

"unemployment has fallen . . . employment . . . has yet to show strong recovery?"

In view of what he has been telling the House about the fall in unemployment, will he explain why not enough jobs are being created and whether the fall in unemployment does not have far more to do with disillusioned people dropping out of the market than with the creation of new jobs to take people back into work?

Mr. Hunt: The Opposition have argued that we should accept Labour Force Survey and International Labour Organisation measure of unemployment and employment. In the 12-month period between winter 1992 and winter 1993—the latest period for which statistics are available—unemployment fell by 180,000 and claimant unemployment figures fell by 187,000. In the same period, the number of jobs increased by 147,000. Those figures show that there has been a substantial increase in employment.

Mr. Congdon: Given the determined efforts of the European Commission to impose social costs on British industry, will my right hon. Friend continue to do everything that he can to resist any measures from Brussels that would increase unemployment in this country?

Mr. Hunt: My right hon. and hon. Friends and I will continue our efforts to persuade our colleagues in the European Union that the only way to create jobs and to overcome the rising tide of unemployment elsewhere in Europe is to ensure that we have measures to remove burdens on employers, that we have a stable economic background—the strength of which in the United Kingdom is shown by figures released today—and that we have a much more flexible labour market. That is the only way to ensure that we create jobs.

Mr. Prescott: Can the Secretary of State explain why he refers to the level of unemployment while his Department refers to that of unemployed claimants? Why is a reduction in the number of claimants not reflected in the level of employment? Is it not just a fiddle by the Government? If they spent half as much time getting people back to work as they spend fiddling the figures, a lot more people would be back at work.

Mr. Hunt: I am pleased to see the hon. Gentleman in his place and that he has made such a swift recovery from a rather unfortunate accident. I refer again to the statistics that I just gave, as I am not too sure whether he could have been listening. I referred to the ILO measure of unemployment, which shows that in the latest 12-month period for which figures are available unemployment fell by 180,000 while at the same time employment rose by 147,000. Instead of casting stones at the figures and insults at the statisticians, the hon. Gentleman might reflect for a moment on my answer, which disproves his allegation.

Labour Statistics

7. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the percentage change in economically inactive adult males of working age since 1981.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There has been a 60 per cent. increase.

Mr. Hain: Is that not significant and does it not give an indication of the hidden level of unemployment? The economically inactive working age totals—the Department's own totals—show that more than 2.5 million adult men of working age, some of whom admittedly are disabled or sick or perhaps have taken early retirement, are being pushed off the official register by the Government's manipulation although they want to work. Why do the Government not have the investment policies to give them an opportunity to work? In Wales, for example, one in every three men is unemployed, by any measure, if we take the official totals and the economically inactive totals. That represents a grotesque waste of talents and abilities.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful, as I am sure my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be, for the hon. Gentleman's support for the reform of invalidity benefit. The hon. Gentleman will know that of that 60 per cent. increase in those who are economically inactive, two thirds of the people involved are registered as sick or long-term disabled. The biggest increase in recent years has been among students, as a result of the Government's determination to encourage more people to go into further and higher education. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to those figures.

Mr. Devlin: In areas such as mine, and in Wales, where older traditional industries were restructured in the early 1980s, the Government have taken several significant initiatives to try to bring down the level of male unemployment. Despite the difficulty in training older men to learn computing and similar skills, have not many of those measures in the north of England been strikingly effective?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The great benefit of the job seeker's allowance, when it is introduced, is that it will ensure that every measure is used to encourage people to get back into the labour market, which will be good for them as individuals and for the economy as a whole.

Mr. MacShane: Will the Minister join me in congratulating the German Government, German employers and the German trade unions on ensuring that there are 600,000 young apprentices in their engineering and manufacturing industries? What hope can he give the 16 to 18-year-olds in Rotherham, who have pitifully few apprenticeships and traineeships in industry—the lowest number in the European Community?

Mr. Forsyth: I am astonished that Opposition Members should praise the German Government in the House, yet not praise my right hon. Friend for his initiative on modern apprenticeships in this country. I am also astonished that the hon. Gentleman did not find time in his question to praise the fall in unemployment in his own constituency.

Working Hours

8. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimates he has made of the number of United Kingdom workers who would be affected by a statutory reduction in the working week to 35 hours.

Mr. David Hunt: The estimate is 14.75 million.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply, which could not demonstrate more clearly the wisdom of the Government's robust rejection of the social chapter. Will he give the House an assurance that he will continue to reject the current conditions of that chapter, knowing the catastrophic effect that they would have on the success of British companies? That fact seems to have escaped the unreformed socialist party, in the shape of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

Mr. Hunt: I give my hon. Friend that categorical assurance, and add that when the 48-hour working time directive originally came from the Commission it was designed to compel people to work no more than 48 hours a week. Mr. Ford, a member of the European Parliament on the Opposition side—

Mr. Prescott: We are not the Opposition there.

Mr. Hunt: Mr. Ford, who is from the Labour party, said that he would like to see— *[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East calm down for a moment and recognise that Mr. Ford has argued that instead of a 48-hour week there should be a 35-hour week right across the European Union? *[Interruption.]* I hear several voices approving that idea. That would mean telling 14.75 million people in the United Kingdom that they would no longer be allowed to work the hours that they chose. It would also impose costs of £20,000 million on industry, as well as a compulsory pay cut of £20,000 million.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Secretary of State, therefore, tell us why 68 per cent. of those at work in the United Kingdom are forced to work the longest working week in Europe to earn a decent living wage? Those are not the hours that they want to work; they can earn a decent wage only in that way. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that since 1979, British income per head has fallen from the European average to below the European average? Will he remind us which party has been in government since 1979?

Mr. Hunt: I have two points in answer to that three-pronged question. First, in the United Kingdom, the average working week is just less than the average working week in the European Union. Secondly, let us look at take-home pay. I have here the latest table for European countries, which I am very willing to place in the Library, which shows annual take-home pay in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in 1991. For a single person, take-home pay in the United Kingdom was the second highest in the whole of the European Union.

Training and Enterprise Councils

9. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of the TEC movement; and what matters were discussed.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet TEC representatives to discuss a wide range of topics.

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend will be aware that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State paid a successful visit on 6 June to Somerset training and enterprise council. She may also be aware that Somerset TEC recently commissioned a survey which showed that 79 per cent. of all recently started-up businesses were still flourishing 18 months later. Will my hon. Friend consider the possibility

of giving a high priority to bids under the single regeneration budget? They are extremely important to those who seek start-up funding.

Miss Widdecombe: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the performance of Somerset TEC. I confirm that the survey showing that 79 per cent. of new businesses were still trading was extremely encouraging and correct. The business start-up scheme is now part of the single regeneration budget. All bids for the regeneration fund, which is now included in that budget, will be most seriously considered. It is worth recording that 650,000 business start-ups were successfully implemented in the past year.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: When the Secretary of State and the Minister met the TECs, did they discuss the London School of Economics report which showed that because of Government underfunding, the TECs were locked into delivering low-quality training simply for the unemployed? Does the Minister agree that if we are to begin to harness the potential of the nation's labour force and to enhance skill levels, we shall need considerably more than a change of direction by the Government. We shall need a change of Government.

Miss Widdecombe: We discussed not merely the LSE report, but far more up-to-date findings which show that the quality of TEC training is steadily improving. It is worth recording that there have been 165,000 youth training or credit starts since August, 650,000 business start-ups and 272,000 training for work a year. When we measure outcomes in terms of national vocational qualification level 3, which I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can call a derisory qualification, we find that the TECs are delivering training in very much the way that we hoped and that they are getting better at it all the time. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to congratulate his local TEC on its performance.

Mr. Rowe: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the standards that the Department uses to measure the effectiveness of the TECs are adequate? Is she also satisfied that the performance of the best TECs is published regularly to enable TECs that are not so effective to catch up?

Miss Widdecombe: The measurements that we use measure skills gained, qualifications gained, successful outcomes and those in employment at the end of training. We believe that those measures are the best as they successfully establish what the outcome of training has been. We are satisfied that they are correct and we are satisfied that there is increasing performance by the TECs. Having published the league tables of TECs, which give comparative performance, we believe that the best practices will now be disseminated and that TECs that have poorer performances will be encouraged to improve.

Labour Statistics

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his most recent estimate of the number of people who are counted twice or thrice in the employment totals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Three per cent. of the employed work force have two or more jobs.

Mr. Flynn: Was not it unfair of Mr. Alan Clark in his diaries to say that the Department of Employment did nothing but concoct useless schemes to con the unemployed off the register, ignoring entirely the imaginative, creative energetic work that takes place in the Department every month to fiddle the employment and unemployment figures? Should not the Department's headquarters be recognised for what it is; the country's biggest, most shameless, most disreputable massage parlour?

Mr. Forsyth: I am responsible for many difficult things, but, fortunately, I am not responsible for Mr. Alan Clark's diaries.

Sir Donald Thompson: Has my hon. Friend any idea of the number of people who are registered unemployed or are registered for benefit who are working?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend will be aware that we are proposing to introduce the new job seeker's allowance, which will help to ensure that people are targeted and that we give them the help and support that they need to get back into employment. It is interesting that a number of those measures in the past have resulted in people leaving the register entirely. It is wholly proper that our resources should be concentrated on minimising the number of people who face unemployment and on helping those who face unemployment back into work.

Mr. Prescott: Can the Minister explain why the Department's own statisticians have agreed that the adjustment to the unemployment criteria figures have reduced the claimants by at least 500,000 and that the double counting for the employment figures has increased them? Is that a pure coincidence or, by political design, just one, big, major fiddle?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is talking nonsense. I cannot think why we have Question Time after Question Time when he makes the same points about the figures. Presumably, it is because he is not able to give the House any answers as to how he would deliver the full employment which he boasts he and his party can achieve.

Redundant Service Personnel

11. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to visit the Wiltshire training and enterprise council to discuss the re-employment of redundant service personnel.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to visit Wiltshire training and enterprise council. However, my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will meet TEC representatives when he visits the Royal British Legion training centre at Tidworth next month.

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that if my hon. Friend or, indeed, if my right hon. Friend were able to visit the Wiltshire training and enterprise council, they would be made well aware of the excellent job prospects which we now in have in northern Wiltshire. They would also be told of the concern over the future of the business start-up scheme. May I draw, again, to the attention of the House the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson)? There is considerable concern

about future funding prospects under that scheme, especially for the ex-service men, who will be looking for work in the Wiltshire area in the near future. Is there anything more that my hon. Friend can say to give comfort to the TEC and to those potential beneficiaries of the start-up scheme?

Miss Widdecombe: At the kind invitation of my hon. Friend, I shall be delighted to visit Wiltshire TEC as soon as it is possible to do so. Meanwhile, may I tell him that, within three months of being made redundant, 80 per cent of ex-service personnel are employed or otherwise settled according to their own requirements. Indeed, that is given a high priority. My hon. Friend will also be aware of the help given to redundant service personnel by my Department. I can assure him that that will continue. In response to the question about the business start-up scheme, I can only reassure my hon. Friend that funds have been made available in the single regeneration budget and that all bids will be considered on their merit.

Mr. Janner: When the Minister is considering the re-employment of service personnel, whether at the Wiltshire TEC or anywhere else, does she put that into the overall structure? Has she or the Secretary of State discussed the sacking and redundancies among service personnel with the Secretary of State for Defence? If so, how many service personnel has the Secretary of State for Defence said are likely to be made redundant in the next six months?

Miss Widdecombe: There is constant contact between my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Defence. These matters are regularly discussed.

Labour Statistics

12. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Yorkshire and Humberside have been placed in work by the Employment Service in the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of 132,200 people have been placed in employment in Yorkshire and Humberside by the Employment Service. That is 16.7 per cent. more than in the previous year.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware of the investment in jobs in Batley and Spen by Thomas' of Europe, which was again recruiting for its work force, and the £1.5 million investment by Thomas Carr in new spinning machinery for carpet yarn, which will safeguard jobs and, we hope, produce more in the near future?

Mr. Forsyth: I am aware of that good news. I am not surprised that Batley and Spen has benefited from inward investment and growth in employment, and especially from having such an able Member of Parliament who never ceases to take the opportunity to bang the drum for their benefit and to support jobs in her constituency.

Mr. Barron: Between 1981 and 1991, Yorkshire and Humberside lost more than 110,000 full-time jobs. They have been replaced by 123,000 part-time jobs—a full-time job loss equivalent of somewhere in the region of 62,000 jobs. Are the Government proud of that record?

Mr. Forsyth: I am extremely proud of the Government's record in encouraging the creation of part-time jobs. If the hon. Gentleman is not careful, he will find himself in trouble with the feminist wing in his party because two thirds of part-time jobs are held by people who want part-time jobs, not people who cannot find full-time jobs. Many of them are women who are able to get back into work while maintaining their family responsibilities. That is the result of the Government taking on the vested interests for which the hon. Gentleman speaks.

Careers Service

13. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to improve the careers service.

Miss Widdecombe: A new framework for providing careers services is now in place which should see a more flexible, effective and higher quality careers service, giving greater value for money for clients and the taxpayer alike.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend will know that the range of careers available to young people nowadays is much wider than ever before. In what ways is the careers service ensuring that our young people have a full grasp of that wide range of opportunities?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right: there are more opportunities for young people than ever before. They will be enhanced yet again in September when modern apprenticeship prototypes become available in a whole range of new opportunities. Government investment in the careers service has resulted in more impartial, more frequent and better quality advice. As the second round of the pathfinders exercise is completed, those good effects will spread. Not even Labour Members can resist congratulating the Government on modern apprenticeships, accelerated apprenticeships, the new careers guidance announced in the White Paper—

Madam Speaker: Order. The answer is far too long. I have other hon. Members to call.

Mr. Hardy: While one has great sympathy with, and appreciates the work of, the careers service, can the Minister tell the House whether the advice of the careers service is to ensure that young people seeking assistance are warned that many of the jobs that they will be persuaded to take will provide salaries or wages of £2.20 an hour, as offered to some of my adult constituents, and would therefore allow the Minister to describe them as economically active? Would the Minister also describe them as economically and socially deprived?

Miss Widdecombe: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that no inaccurate advice is given by the careers service.

Training Credits

14. **Mr. Trend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people have taken up training credits; and what plans he has to extend the scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: More than 100,000 young people in England have started using youth credits and we intend to extend them throughout England next year.

Mr. Trend: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the volume and variety of training experience for our young people has increased through training credits, and that modern apprenticeships should further increase the scope of training opportunities for our young people?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Not only do we have one of the lowest rates of youth unemployment in the European Union—or well below the European Union average. In the new modern apprenticeship scheme, we now have some exciting new opportunities for all 16, 17 and, subsequently, 18 and 19-year-olds to start work-based training in an apprenticeship mode which I believe will be an example to the rest of Europe.

Job Seeker's Allowance

16. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the likely effects of the proposed job seeker's allowance on the efficiency of the labour market.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The job seeker's allowance will encourage wider and more effective job search.

Mr. Booth: Does the job seeker's allowance encourage imaginative use of long-term unemployment? Does it also remotivate people who have lost their motivation through consistent rejection? Is it one more imaginative and exciting scheme from a party which is imaginative and exciting?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right. The introduction of the job seeker's allowance will mean that those people who have been unemployed for a long time will be given the help and support that they are entitled to expect to get them back into work and that those people who are resting on unemployment benefit will find themselves being asked to take more active steps to find work. That will be good for them and good for the economy as a whole.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Gillan: Will my right hon. Friend forgive me for injecting a little ray of sunshine so early in today's proceedings by drawing his attention to the economic forecast published this morning by the Treasury, which shows prospects of steady growth coupled with low inflation? Does he agree that that highlights the success of our economic policies and further shows that the policies of the Labour party, with their limitless public spending, would damage the economy, damage jobs and damage our businesses?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to be cheerful about the forecast this morning. Growth is higher and inflation is lower. We now have a clear chance of sustainable growth with low inflation for the period ahead. That is extremely good news for the British economy. It is a chance that lies ahead of us and we have no intention of letting it slip.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Prime Minister agree with what the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said in Barcelona yesterday—that in Spain family ties are stronger and there is a greater spirit of local community than in Britain?

The Prime Minister: I do not have the same knowledge of Spain as my right hon. Friend has, but I can say that my right hon. Friend made an excellent speech in Spain yesterday—an excellent and serious speech and one of a series that have been made by my right hon. Friends, addressing problems of concern to everyone in this country.

Mrs. Beckett: As the Prime Minister has in effect endorsed the Chief Secretary's speech, I must presume that he agrees. After 15 years of Conservative Government, if family life in Britain is undermined, why does the Prime Minister think that that is the case?

The Prime Minister: All my right hon. Friends are concerned about the role of the family and how to maintain it. For us, family values and family life are central not only to our national life but to the existence of each and every person in this country. What my right hon. Friend has made clear and is self-evidently the case—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will have order in this House.

The Prime Minister: What my right hon. Friend has made clear—I think that this is the kind of matter that we ought to be able to discuss without the sort of interpretation that the right hon. Lady puts on it—is that there are many areas of family life which are not the concern of Government and in which the Government are not the best arbiter. We have a responsibility for providing some vital services such as education, health and others, but the reality is that the essence of family life lies within the family itself. My right hon. Friend was right to draw attention to that.

Mrs. Beckett: It seems to me that the Prime Minister has yet again endorsed what the Chief Secretary said. I shall put to him for the second time what I put to him a moment ago. Why does he feel that family life and the spirit of community in Britain have been undermined in the 15 years his Government have been in power? I remind him of what he said in Los Angeles last year. He said:

"We have been here for 14 years. There is no one else to blame for anything else that has gone wrong."

Is not that the most truthful thing that he has said in years?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Lady has perhaps not read my right hon. Friend's speech in full. If she had—

Mrs. Beckett *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: Well, I would be surprised if she had read it, but, if she says she has, she clearly did not understand it.

If she had read it, she would no doubt have seen the rest of my right hon. Friend's speech. He made an excellent case for free trade, deregulation and economic policies which encourage innovation and self-respect. He made the

point clearly that only if we do that can we sustain the genuine services necessary to sustain the family and those in genuine need.

I note the right hon. Lady's strong support for the welfare state. Perhaps she will set out the areas that she would seek to improve, and how she would propose to finance that improvement.

Q2. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend will appreciate the difficulty that there will be in justifying an increase in Britain's contribution to the European Community budget at a time when our defence budget is being drastically pruned. Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the existing difficulties in explaining why soldiers, sailors and airmen are being made redundant at the same time as people working in the black economy continue to live at the expense of the taxpayers, drawing benefits to which they are neither entitled nor have earned?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's concern to stamp out social security fraud, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has stepped up the fight against it. We are looking, for example, at the possibility of introducing personalised cards as one of the methods of ensuring that we minimise and, I hope, eradicate social security fraud against the taxpayer.

As far as the first half of my hon. Friend's question is concerned, he will no doubt be aware of the agreement that I reached in Edinburgh on the future financing of the Community, which set clear and rigorous limits, not for the traditional five years of an agreement but for seven years of an agreement, and at a lower rate of increase than in the past. It also safeguarded the British rebate which was at some risk from our European partners. That was money which we had to fight hard to keep. I might add that, had we not had a veto, we might not have been able to keep that money.

Mr. Ashdown: Given the present economic situation, is the Prime Minister opposed to further steps to increase the independence of the Bank of England?

The Prime Minister: I have made my view clear that I am not at this moment in favour of further steps to increase the independence of the Bank of England.

Sir Cranley Onslow: If the signalmen's strike is not settled soon, will my right hon. Friend consider making a ministerial broadcast on the subject—however much it might embarrass the Opposition to find someone willing to accept the right of reply?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has finally broken cover on the subject of the strike, even though the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has been notably silent. The hon. Gentleman has said that he supports the strike, and so do 40 of his Back-Bench colleagues. It will be interesting to see whether any of the leadership contenders do the same. After all, 40 votes are 40 votes.

Q3. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hoon: Is the Prime Minister reminded of the career of Frederick Augustus of York, who lost his job as commander in chief following a disastrous European campaign? Is not the Prime Minister's problem that he is neither up with those who make and shape European policy, and is too often down with those who would have Britain leave the European Union? Is not it the case that the Government's policy, like the grand old Duke of York, staggers from one crisis to the next and fails to protect Britain's longer-term interests?

The Prime Minister: I think that, from a party that would abandon the veto, talk of protecting Britain's long-term interests will sound pretty hollow to most people in this country. The Opposition's European policy is to find out what the others want and then agree with it so that they can claim not to be in a minority. I have been able to discover not one area of originality in their European policy. We have set out and will continue to set out our own vision of how Europe should develop. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) will be surprised at the echo, right across Europe, of the nature of the European Community which we wish to develop.

Q4. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Duncan: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming yesterday's announcement that parental choice will be extended by allowing the expansion of popular schools and grammar schools? Is he further aware that, despite their blurred rhetoric, the Opposition are still committed to the abolition of grant-maintained schools, hate grammar schools, and would deny parents the choice to which they are entitled?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, the Opposition dislike choice of almost any sort—they have a difficult choice to make in the next few weeks. Yesterday's announcement is excellent news for parents, giving them more choice and letting good schools grow. I regret the fact that the Opposition have such a negative education policy—the abolition of grant-maintained schools; the abolition of training and enterprise councils; the abolition of the assisted places scheme; the abolition of teacher training reform; and the abolition of performance tables. They would abolish everything that would provide more information for parents and a better education for children. However much they may dislike it, they should remember how they cut education budgets when they were in Government. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) came into Government because her predecessor declined to make cuts. She came into Government to cut.

Dr. Godman: The Prime Minister knows of the derailment of a train in Greenock on Saturday night. The driver—a young man from Glasgow—and a young lad from Greenock were killed instantly. They were murdered by murderous individuals who placed concrete slabs on the line. Since then, two copycat incidents have taken place in Cumbernauld and Duddingston, fortunately with no loss of

life. Will the Prime Minister and his Transport Ministers assure the House today that Railtrack will do everything in its power to eliminate such murderous behaviour? Will they assure us that the safety and school liaison units will not be reduced, as some people fear, but given an enhanced educational role to reduce, if not eliminate, such terrible acts against train crews and passengers?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing my condolences to the family of the driver, Mr. McKee, and to Mr. Nicol, the passenger, who were so tragically killed. As the hon. Gentleman said, it appears to be an act of mindless vandalism that has resulted in the death of two entirely innocent people. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Strathclyde police are conducting an inquiry into the incident and treating it as murder. In addition, Railtrack and British Rail are conducting a joint investigation. The Health and Safety Executive inspector has already visited the site and the railway inspectorate is working alongside in the investigation. We will do all that we can to eliminate the possibility of such incidents in future and bring to book those responsible for this one.

Q5. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is no coincidence that, as soon as the chattering classes start to talk up the possibility of a future Labour Government, trade union militants start to rear their ugly heads? Does not the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers strike provide a timely reminder of what has always happened under Labour Governments and what would happen under a future Labour Government? Does my right hon. Friend agree that what the House really wants to know is where Bambi stands on the rail strike?

Hon. Members: Where is he?

The Prime Minister: I am prepared to take responsibility for the opinion of many people, but not for that of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). He must answer for himself, when and if he returns to the House. *[Interruption.]* I think that most people will have noticed that the contenders for the leadership of the Labour party, although addressing every conference that presents itself up and down the country, will not be addressing the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers conference. One of them is sponsored by it. They seem happy to take its money, but unwilling to address it.

Mr. Jack Thompson: The Prime Minister is very keen to express his views on choice, and especially on market testing. Will he consider market testing his Government by having an election?

The Prime Minister: Certainly, in 1996 or 1997—and we shall win it.

Tampons (Safety)

3.30 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I beg to move—

Madam Speaker: Order. Will Members leaving please do so very quietly and quickly? We have business to conduct. Please leave very quietly. *[Interruption.]* Order. There is a lady attempting to address the House.

Ms Primarolo: I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for tampon packaging and advertisements for tampons to carry certain warnings and information, and to require the Secretary of State to make regulations for these purposes; to lay upon the Secretary of State duties with respect to research into, and publicity for, tampons and health; and for connected purposes.

Toxic shock syndrome was defined by doctors in the USA in 1980 as a severe infection of the blood, identified by a collection of symptoms, including sudden high temperature, vomiting, diarrhoea, headaches, confusion and low blood pressure. Without treatment, the infection can rapidly cause fatal respiratory and kidney failure. Toxic shock syndrome strikes men, women and children.

The infection is caused by the production of toxins by common bacteria that are present on all of us. The aspect that has attracted the most attention is the fact that, in half the cases, young women have been struck by toxic shock syndrome who have been using tampons.

The bacteria are carried by 35 to 50 per cent. of adults. They are harmless, move freely over the body frequently and are not connected with how often we wash ourselves. However, when suitable conditions arise, the bacteria have the ability to produce toxins or poisons which enter the bloodstream and circulate around the body, attacking the vital organs.

The presence of the toxins in the blood stimulates the body to make antitoxins, which have the power to neutralise the poison, but in young people that immunity may not have had the opportunity to develop, so the body is overwhelmed. Most tampon-related TSS infections occur in the age group 15 to 25, and most TSS infections from wounds and bites occur in men and children.

The bacteria do not always produce toxins during menstruation, but when they do, it is almost always associated with tampon use. The exact link between the tampon and the toxin is not known. There is no simple cause and effect; if there were, prevention could be specific and easy. Tampons have not been found to cause TSS—any one of a combination of symptoms could trigger the toxin production, but the link with tampons appears to be clear.

There are more suggested links, but what is known is that all types and brands of tampons have been linked with TSS. A particularly high absorbency tampon called "Rely" was linked to an upsurge in TSS deaths in the United States of America in 1980. The brand was withdrawn from the market, and has never been on sale in the United Kingdom, because of the recognised links.

There is currently no way of testing whether one is immune to the toxins. There is no way of carrying out checks on the levels of bacteria and their likely consequences. It is possible to avoid that form of TSS by not using tampons, but many millions of women wish to use them. My Bill seeks to make clear the precautions that women should take to minimise the risk. It calls on the Government to take specific steps with the manufacturers to make the situation clear to women.

Three young women have died from tampon-related TSS in the past seven months. It is a rare disease, but that is no reason not to act. In Bristol earlier this year, a young woman of 32, with two small children, died tragically from TSS. Her mother wrote to me to support my Bill. She said that her daughter felt unwell on Friday, was vomiting and had a high temperature on Saturday, and had dramatically low blood pressure on Sunday. She died on Monday, after six cardiac arrests, and nobody made the connection between her illness and TSS.

Toxic shock syndrome is treatable with antibiotics, as long as it is identified early enough. Scores of women who have survived the illness and suffered the results of severe blood infection are receiving counselling. Many women have had their legs, toes or fingers amputated as a result of the disease. But the Department of Health refuses to send out leaflets to doctors, on the grounds that the illness is not a high enough priority.

Many general practitioners fail to recognise the illness, perhaps understandably, because of its rareness. Two doctors took no notice of Jane Grant when she suggested that the tampon that she was wearing might have something to do with her feeling unwell. She spent 10 days fighting for her life after her symptoms were wrongly diagnosed. That is simply not acceptable.

At present, tampon packets carry voluntary warnings, but they are so tiny that many people miss them. We need to ensure that the symptoms are well known, that women are provided with the necessary health warnings, and that the Government give priority to researching the disease.

A father who wrote to me about the death of his 15-year-old daughter in 1989 from TSS, connected with the use of tampons, sums up the situation perfectly:

"We have no complaint about those who attended our daughter. All of those who treated her clearly wanted her to survive as much as we did. No apparent stone was left unturned. She died however because a few well-established and simple facts about TSS were not widely known to any of us who were in a position to influence her treatment in those crucial early hours of her illness."

Even the manufacturing industry understands the difficulty. My Bill seeks clear prominent warnings on packaging, an alert card explaining what the symptoms are and what one should do, research and information to doctors, and to ensure that the Department of Health makes TSS a notifiable disease so that we can start collecting the information truly to understand what the disease is, why it strikes women and how we can eradicate it.

3.39 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am rising to oppose the Bill, although it seems an eminently attractive proposition. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) has highlighted an important issue, but it needs to be represented accurately. I am not associated with the tampon industry in any way, other than having discussed the matter with its representatives.

It is important that the items under discussion, which have improved the lives of so many women, should not be misrepresented, and that the hon. Lady's actions should not be allowed to scare women unnecessarily throughout the country.

In the detail of her notice of motion, the hon. Lady has called for Government regulations to make provision for

certain warnings on packaging and advertisements. I do not believe that any such legislation is required. The tampon industry has already made adequate provision for warnings about toxic shock syndrome on its packaging. Indeed, as early as 1980, warnings appeared on instruction leaflets inside the boxes and since the beginning of 1993 on the outside. They are quite clear. I shall read the warning:

"Attention—tampons are associated with toxic shock syndrome. TSS is a rare but serious disease that may cause death. Read and save the enclosed information".

I cannot understand how the hon. Lady believes that placing warnings on advertisements, presumably even television advertisements, can contribute to health understanding.

Toxic shock syndrome, its symptoms and risk reduction factors, comprise a complex condition believed to be better dealt with in a more educational environment. I wonder whether the hon. Lady has seen the Tambrands Education Service literature or the Marion Cooper Advisory Service literature, which cover TSS, not in isolation, but in relation to the whole picture of an individual's health, including details on TSS.

Inaccurate information and misleading statistics have been circulated on TSS, and the Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers, which represents the majority of United Kingdom manufacturers of sanitary protection products, has compiled a detailed fact sheet on the known and established facts, which is widely circulated to GPs, among others. As GPs rarely see the condition, the ASPM has made provision to notify the clinical definition, and has recommended questions for GPs to ask patients to reduce the chance of misdiagnosis.

TSS is a very rare illness, and, as the hon. Lady said, can be contracted by men, children and women—both menstrual and non-menstrual. There were only 18 confirmed or probable cases in 1992 and 16 in 1993, out of a total population of 58 million, and of those cases five, sadly, resulted in death. The Public Health Laboratory Service indicates that, of those, one or two deaths are associated with tampon use.

The Medical Research Council is not supporting any specific research into TSS, but rather basic research into staphylococcus aureus, the bacteria which causes TSS. The bug lives quite harmlessly in more than 35 per cent. of the population, but can be triggered in a minute number of cases into producing toxins. I agree with the hon. Lady that research into this organism and its effects is desirable and should be encouraged, as it affects men and children as well as women, but highlighting its relationship to tampons alone could distort the research, which needs to be more widely based.

I want to get the matter into perspective. A report in *The Guardian* on 21 June stated that more than 100 people a year die of paracetamol-linked kidney failure, and between 630 and 676 women die annually in the United Kingdom as a result of complications in pregnancy and childbirth, so the risk is far greater in these cases than the one in 15 million chance of woman contracting TSS related to tampon use and subsequently dying.

This Bill is a regulation too far. As the hon. Lady is a Front-Bench spokesperson for her party, British industry should be aware that, based on her proposal, it can expect even more regulation were there to be a Labour Government.

I felt very sad, as we all did, for the families who have had someone die from possible TSS that could be tampon-related. I do not want in any way to minimise their loss. However, I must say that the tampon industry takes its responsibilities very seriously, and works to a voluntary code of practice that was developed with the Department of Trade and Industry.

Tampons have made a real and positive contribution to the way in which women can live their lives. More than 5,000 people are employed in the industry, including union members of USDAW, TGWU and AEU. The Bill could not only threaten their jobs but send the wrong message to women who choose to use tampons. While I do not for one minute underestimate a very rare, unpleasant and sometimes deadly condition, it is necessary for someone to underline the safety of the product and to set at rest the minds of millions of women who use it with no adverse effects. I am sure that some of those women are in the Chamber right now.

I do not want to make this a party political matter, so I shall not press it to a vote. However, it is important that excessive intervention such as is envisaged in the Bill should be highlighted, and that unnecessary scaremongering by the Opposition should not go unchallenged on such an important health issue for women.

Like the hon. Lady, I want more research into TSS for the sake of women and also for men and children, but not at the expense of the peace of mind of women throughout the country who use or wish to use tampons.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Dawn Primarolo, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms Jean Corston, Ms Clare Short, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Ms Tessa Jowell, Ms Harriet Harman, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Ian McCartney and Dr. Lewis Moonie.

Tampons (Safety)

Ms Dawn Primarolo accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for tampon packaging and advertisements for tampons to carry certain warnings and information, and to require the Secretary of State to make regulations for these purposes; to lay upon the Secretary of State duties with respect to research into, and publicity for, tampons and health; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 July, and to be printed. [Bill 136.]

Points of Order

3.48 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. At your convenience, could you reflect and rule on the entirely new practice of hon. Members speaking against a ten-minute Bill and then not pressing the matter to a vote? As I understand it, it is a new practice and an abuse of House of Commons procedure.

Madam Speaker: It is not at all new—it is well established, and is included in "Erskine May". Any Member seeking to oppose such a Bill is free to do so. Of course, that hon. Member must raise his or her voice in opposition, but the matter does not necessarily need to proceed to a Division. That is for me to determine, depending on the voices that I hear.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. There can be no further point of order on that matter. I have made a ruling. The matter is covered in "Erskine May". It is there for hon. Members to look at.

Mrs. Currie: On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. It might be worth reminding hon. Members, especially women Members, that, if they want to introduce Bills that need the support of women on both sides of the House, they might invite some to become sponsors.

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for me.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I will have no argument about whether women Members are invited to sponsor Bills. I take it that the hon. Lady's point of order does not relate to that.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. When a 10-minute Bill is to be opposed, is it not the convention for the hon. Member opposing it to give notice to the hon. Member presenting it? Is that not an elementary courtesy?

Madam Speaker: No, that is not the case. The hon. Member opposing the Bill must listen to what is said by the promoter before he or she can decide whether to oppose it.

Coal Industry Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 12

RESTRUCTURING SCHEMES IN RELATION TO PROPERTY ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 12, line 46, leave out from first ("that") to end of line 47 and insert—

> ("(i) that person consented to the provisions of the Scheme so far as they relate to him;
>
> (ii) no persons to whom obligations are owed, whether in respect of contamination or other liabilities arising out of the occupation of any property used in connection with coal-mining operations by the Corporation or its predecessors, is likely to sustain loss as a consequence of the Scheme.")

3.50 pm

Mr. Stewart Bell (Middlesbrough): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Lords amendment, amendment (b), at the end to add

> '(iii) any such liabilities, including environmental liabilities, arise in relation to coal mines and abandoned coal mines, in which case those liabilities shall be transferred to the Authority on the restructuring date.'.

Madam Speaker: With this, we may consider the Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 1: in page 13, line 7, at end insert—

> '(5A) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State, in exercising his powers under this section to make a restructuring scheme in accordance with which any person other than—
>
> (a) a person mentioned in subsection (4)(a) to (d) above, or
>
> (b) a body of whom all the members are appointed by a Minister of the Crown,
>
> is to become subject to any liabilities, to have regard to the fact that it would not be appropriate for the scheme to provide for the transfer of any of those liabilities to any person except where it is reasonable to believe that that person is a person who will be able to finance their discharge.'.

Mr. Bell: Opposition amendment (b) to the Lords amendment simply seeks to square assurances given by Ministers many times, but not yet acted on. It seeks a full transfer of liabilities from British Coal to the Coal Authority on the restructuring date.

We are all aware that coal mining is not like any other business. We are all aware that it leaves behind long-term liabilities; we are all aware of its tremendous impact on the physical environment—subsidence, polluted water and contaminated land—and know that those effects can persist for decades.

We are also aware that, in the past, British Coal has taken action to control, prevent or even remedy that legacy; but what will happen when British Coal ceases to exist? Where will the responsibility lie? Will not the coalfield communities that will exist long after the pits have gone suffer unduly unless the liabilities are dealt with by another responsible body, such as the Coal Authority referred to in the Bill?

The amendment seeks, in a limited but important way, to ensure that communities are fully protected from circumstances in which environmental damage is allowed to continue because the legally responsible party is unable to pay for the necessary remedial work.

We all know of the work that has been done up and down the country—especially in County Durham—to rid the county of dereliction from its coal-mining and industrial past. It could be said—as Durham county council

says—that that has been an outstanding achievement by a partnership between central and local government going back 25 years.

As a consequence of that partnership, residents and businesses have been able to pick themselves up and involve themselves in new types of investment—sometimes in overseas investment. Our amendment will ensure that the upward curve of investment and improved environment in the coal communities will continue, by providing for environmental liabilities to be transferred to the Coal Authority.

What we seek would be in line with the Minister's own commitment in a letter to the leader of Durham county council, dated 8 November 1993, to establishing a long-term framework to deal with water pollution from coal mines in the context of coal privatisation. The amendment would clarify that framework in respect of pollution related to abandoned mines of all kinds.

We know—this relates to the Government's amendment—that none of the transfer schemes will work in Durham, because there is no deep mining left there. There will be no private buyers to take on themselves the obligations laid down in that amendment. Who, then, will be responsible? Will it be the county council, the National Rivers Authority, some other Government Department or the appropriate river purification board? Will there be another review? The Department of Trade and Industry moves the problem from one pair of hands to another, not even stopping to wash them, as did Pontius Pilate.

I am aware of the statements made in the other place by Lord Strathclyde on 26 April this year, when he sought to assuage the anxieties of his colleagues. He recognised the concerns that arose

"about the threat of water pollution from coal mines and about the effects of privatisation."

I doubt whether he reassured many of his noble Friends. There is no legislative commitment to meet the residual liability for British Coal's past actions. There is no legal obligation upon British Coal to continue to pump and there will be no private buyers.

He recognised that

"continued pumping is required to prevent a serious pollution incident; or at all events, to give an assurance that such an incident can be avoided."

He was certain that there must be a commitment to maintain pumping for as long as it was needed in order to prevent the risk of serious pollution. Again, we have no legislative commitment. Those who sat on the Committee considering the Bill asked for such commitments repeatedly, but we were never given them.

According to Lord Strathclyde, we were soon into the area of spending—limited resources, Exchequer restraints and the hand of the Treasury over-arching across the Bill, as it does so many other measures.

We have all read the speech made in Spain by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It seems that, if we want to know what the Government are thinking, we must look at speeches made as far away from these shores as possible. That is what the Chief Secretary did. He told the Spaniards that markets should be controlling Governments.

Here at home, there will be no resources, or at least only limited resources, to decide whether pumping continues in County Durham and elsewhere. The noble Lord Strathclyde said:

"noble lords on all sides will recognise that its resources will be necessarily limited."

He wanted to assure the other place that the Coal Authority would

"in due course have a specific budget earmarked for these purposes".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 April 1994; Vol. 554, c. 541-42.]

We have a liability that pumping will continue, contingent upon there being resources. Again, we have no legislative commitment, we have nothing in writing, nothing in the Bill and nothing on the statute book.

I know that the noble Lord Strathclyde is not in the second-hand car business. However, I have read how one of the candidates for the deputy leadership of the Labour party buys himself a new car every 18 months and drives 40,000 miles in a few weeks. I am sure that he would not buy such a car from the noble Lord Strathclyde.

If we would not buy a car from him, why should we believe anything that he or the Government say when it is not written down on the statute book? Why should those who may have to live with the consequences of water pollution believe them? Why should the people of Durham believe them? Why should the people of other coalfield communities where there are no longer deep mines believe them?

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): If anybody doubts my hon. Friend's description about what is going to happen in Durham, I invite them to visit my constituency to see the filth that is pouring out of abandoned mines now. Pumping has already ceased in that area. Ferrous oxides are staining the rivers and killing all the life. Incidentally, those rivers have been cleaned up through the heroic efforts of local authorities.

Mr. Bell: The Government's amendment misses the point completely, and would not deal with the situation described by my hon. Friend and others. Their amendment is based on the premise that there will be a licence, and that there will be a Coal Authority. It does not take into account what happens when there is no longer extraction and the deep mines no longer exist. When the Coal Authority is gone, everything is gone.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Has my hon. Friend considered the fact that there has always been concern about the safety and pollution of beaches? When there are no pits left in coalfields such as south Wales, Durham, Derbyshire, and so on, there will be a problem of river pollution that could be 10 times worse than the problem with the beaches. The National Rivers Authority found nothing in the River Doe Lea, because it never looked for anything until the Coalite business occurred and there was dioxin contamination.

It is conceivable that the rivers will be heavily polluted, particularly when the mines are closed. Nobody is responsible for them. The NRA will go only if there is a serious complaint, as was the case with Coalite. Unless something is put into the Bill, we will face a problem with all the rivers and streams in coalfield areas such as that which arose with the beaches before the European directive.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose vast knowledge of the coal industry goes back many years, and whose interventions in the House have helped the Opposition but have irritated Conservative Members.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): I represent the former coal-mining area of Durham, whose beaches have gradually become despoiled in the past 50 years and are now perhaps the worst in the United Kingdom. The pit at Londonderry and the Joicey Coal Company are no longer with us. The National Coal Board became British Coal, which will have gone by the end of the year and will be replaced by some nondescript shapeless body called the Coal Authority, which will be devoid of form and financial substance when it carries out its works.

Despoiled water is percolating into the grounds of Auckland castle, the palace of the Bishop of Durham. The problem has been increasing over a number of years. No one appears to want to take responsibility for dealing with it. I agree that the Minister is an honourable gentlemen, but I doubt whether he will still be in his job to honour assurances that were given in Committee. We want our proposals to be included in an Act of Parliament to give us some protection.

4 pm

Mr. Bell: I testify to the despoliation of the beaches near Horden colliery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings). As a child, I spent my holidays walking along those beaches; seeing coal on the beach is not a sight that I will forget.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) links with that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Easington. In the past few years, the Government and local government have tried to rectify the environmental damage. In the House, in Committee or in the other place, we have heard bland statements that somehow, someone, somewhere will deal with pollution. When one reads the fine print of the Bill, one does not find a definitive promise, commitment or assurance that someone, somewhere will be specifically liable to continue the work of cleaning up the environment.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): The problem exists not only in coalfields in England and Wales but in Scotland. We are still tackling problems that arose before nationalisation. I want to add my weight to the appeal to the Government to include concrete provisions in the Bill. They should not do a Pontius Pilate. I know that the Minister is not listening. I hope that my hon. Friend will insist that Scotland is covered and that the amendment will be written in tablets of stone rather than left to the discretion of some unknown person.

Mr. Bell: We are trying, if not to get commitments in tablets of stone, then to get them on the statute book, but vague promises and statements have been made on the subject. In his wind-up speech, the noble Lord Strathclyde said in the other place:

"Civil liabilities of the corporation will stay with the corporation on the restructuring date. When the corporation is ultimately wound up, those liabilities will be transferred elsewhere in the public sector before British Coal is dissolved. British Coal cannot be left with liabilities when it is wound up. We must find a home for those liabilities and we shall do so under the restructuring scheme."

That will not be done under the Bill, The Government have not given commitments to the House, to the other place or to coalfield communities, which are looking to hon. Members to ensure that such commitments are written, if not in tablets of stone, then in the Bill.

Lord Strathclyde continued:

"By becoming the freehold owner of coal and coal mines, the authority will automatically acquire the responsibilities, including environmental liabilities, running with that ownership, which it will pass on to mine operators under the terms of the lease in respect of areas which it licenses for coal mining."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 June 1994; Vol. 556, c. 208.]

That misses completely the point about the deep mines that no longer exist, and from which coal is no longer extracted, but where mine water still needs to be pumped.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): In Blyth Valley, as in all the other constituencies, we have a problem. Unfortunately, that problem is not so much water but gas. When Bates colliery—our last pit—was closed, we found underground workings filled with water, which pushed out the gas. We had to drill and put shafts in to relieve the air pressure, because people were being gassed.

We had a bit of a job to persuade British Coal to take responsibility for that at the time, although eventually it did. But what will happen in the future we do not know. There is nothing in the Bill. If those workings are not maintained and fall into disrepair, gas will escape and gas everybody in Cramlington and Blyth Valley.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He will remember that we first met at Bates colliery one Saturday morning in 1978; I cannot remember the time or the exact date. He has made a good point about the uncertainty. The Bill engenders uncertainty among coalfield communities and people who wish to protect the environment, and uncertainty for individuals. Lord Strathclyde missed the point completely, because, where the deep mines are no longer extracting coal, there is no successor authority to British Coal. That is the problem that faces the House, and the Opposition are trying to define it clearly.

It all boils down to nothing more than guidelines. We have Government assurances, and they mention broad objectives and reasonably practical standards; protection is to come second best to resources, and an enhanced environment is to be dependent on everybody from the National Rivers Authority to "appropriate river purification boards", but not on the Government.

Of course, as the Opposition have strongly argued, if the Bill had contained strong environmental safeguards and a proper environmental framework, the Government would not need to rely for safeguarding the environment on voluntary agreements over which they have no legal control, and we would not have had to table the amendment to the Lords amendment.

This is not a party political point; it is not high politics or high drama; it is a sensible decent amendment designed to alleviate the worries of people in coalfield communities and provide proper assurances for the future of those communities. There would be assurances concerning the control of mine water, and people would be less likely to suffer the consequences of mine water pollution. If the amendment were accepted, it would make the Bill clear. To eradicate doubt and uncertainty is one of the functions of the House, and the House will be at its best today if it accepts the amendment.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I shall be extremely brief, but it would be remiss of me not to add weight to the case for the amendment so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). His speech was well structured but, regrettably, the Minister was too busy gobbing when he should have been listening.

If he had listened, he might have learnt something. Regrettably, yet again, our words have fallen on stony ground.

The amendment is important because of the Government's past practice. When they have relied on voluntary agreements, those agreements have failed. If we are to believe the Government, the environment is vital, not only to this country, but to the rest of the world. Here the Government have the opportunity to practise what they preach. The onus is on them to introduce legislation to bring improvements.

Don drainage in Doncaster, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) knows, was the result of extra money being paid by local people. If subsidence occurs and interferes with that drainage, there will be an impact on the environment. Pollution is bound to follow. I suggest that, for once, the Minister listens to Labour Members and accepts the amendment.

One of the problems is that the Government propose to leave the matter to the voluntary sector. Mine owners in the past did nothing to ensure that we had a healthy environment. Given that, the Minister must accept the amendment if we are to ensure that future generations will have a proper environment.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Does my hon. Friend recall that in his area, as in mine, spoil heaps in mining areas have been an important issue in the past 20 to 30 years? Happily, Governments have taken action to deal with spoil heaps. The majority of spoil heaps, certainly in my area, were created in the days of private enterprise, but over the past 30 years the Government have had to accept responsibility for dealing with the problem, which they did not create. We face a similar problem now. The industry was nationalised from 1947 until now. Many of the water pollution problems need to be dealt with by the organisation that owned the industry—the British people, through the British Government.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the point about spoil heaps, which is a valid one. The coal tip at Yorkshire Main pit caught fire. The pollution caused was not water pollution, but air-borne pollution which caused serious environmental health problems for a number of my constituents downwind of the fire. The Minister should look at the past voluntary agreements, which have not worked, and he should also consider other privatisations carried out by the Government. Leaving matters to the voluntary sector has not worked, so I suggest that the Minister accepts the amendment. Let us move forward to a better future.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): A number of my hon. Friends will recall that my interest in the environment of the coalfields, especially the South Yorkshire coalfield, is long standing. When I entered the House in 1970, I made a fuss about the disgusting condition of our main rivers in South Yorkshire—the Rother, the Dearne and the Don—which were in the lowest category and were little better than open sewers. The Yorkshire Rivers Authority gave a pledge that our rivers would be brought to recreational standard by the mid-1980s. In the mid-1980s, the authority promised that they would be brought to a decent standard by the year 2000. I now wonder whether that standard will be reached.

The reason for my doubt is that many of the streams that feed into the rivers were maintained to a more decent standard than the rivers they joined, because of the work of the National Coal Board and the South Yorkshire mines drainage unit. Those bodies controlled the discharge from abandoned pits.

I remember spending time with Mr. Ditchfield and his colleagues at the South Yorkshire mines drainage unit, which was based in my constituency, and being lowered to the bottom of a shaft of a colliery which had closed in 1873. The shaft had to be kept open for the purposes of pumping. Unfortunately, because of British Coal's economising, the mines drainage unit was closed and the responsibility was passed to Silverwood colliery in my constituency.

But Silverwood colliery is about to close, and the industry will be privatised. The responsibility will accrue to the Coal Authority, and we have not had any assurance that the Coal Authority will have the resources, or the legal power, or the interest, or, in fact, the size of membership and staffing resources, to enable it to do its job.

The Minister is somewhat less enthusiastic about the privatisation of the mining industry than he was when the Bill was first produced.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar) *indicated dissent.*

4.15 pm

Mr. Hardy: Oh, no. When the Government wanted to privatise the pits, they were a great deal more enthusiastic and cheery. But, as the months of consideration went by, they began to realise the scale and liability which would accrue when the public sector's interest diminished—the liability of the legacy of hundreds of thousands of men who suffered or may suffer the consequences of industrial disease. The liability to the environment may be greater than that. It is such a great liability that I do not think that any private insurer would offer a policy.

It is little use the Government and our local authorities devoting resources and giving priority and a great deal of attention to promoting our economic revival as a result of the closure of our pits if not enough is done to prevent the devastation which can follow in the absence of a proper exercise of responsibility. All my hon. Friends who have intervened—a great number already have—will have surely drawn the Minister attention's to the fact that the Coal Authority must have the capacity, in terms of law and resource. It seems essential and, in the interests of those areas affected, the amendment must become part of the Bill.

I hope that, in replying, the Minister will give us that assurance and also give the coalfields of Britain—and former coalfields—the assurance that the authority will have the capacity to exercise properly the responsibilities that the Minister and his colleagues will have placed on it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The amendment stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). I share with him, and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), the constituency responsibility for Breich water and the Almond. One needs only to go along the Almond now, which, incidentally, used to be a clean river because it was cleaned up, and one can see bubbles of iron oxide. There is a real ferruginous pollution problem.

I do not believe in muscling in on the Committees of other Bills on which hon. Friends have worked extremely

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

hard, so I shall content myself with one question, when I have the Minister's attention. I shall ask the question when I have the Minister's attention.

Who is responsible? Lengthy correspondence with the Secretary of State for Scotland and talking to Scottish Ministers has not identified who is responsible for the cleaning up of the Almond and Breich water. It is a simple, straight question. If those in the Box cannot answer it, I would hope to receive a letter from the Department.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The arguments have been well rehearsed over the past months while we have considered the Bill. However, even at this late stage, it is important to press the amendment for the people who live in the coalfield communities, because, over the years, they have lived with pollution and dereliction. People who live in coalfield villages and towns have high aspirations for their children and for their environment. They have seen enormous dereliction over the past few months.

Over the past year, the Nottinghamshire coalfield has been laid waste by a closure programme. The people of Nottinghamshire now want to see the environment lifted, and the amendment would provide a way of doing that. It would secure the future over contaminated land and pit spoil heaps.

The people in Nottinghamshire want to see Sherwood forest come again. They have an ambitious scheme to create a new community forest—a forest that will be planted on the spoil heap. Some of the spoil heaps may pass into the ownership of voluntary bodies. The people of Nottinghamshire do not want to be left with commitments that they cannot meet. Assurances have been given by the Minister and his colleagues in another place, but the amendment would secure that future.

The amendment also brings to a head the issue of mine water, which has been pursued relentlessly by my hon. Friends. At Annesley, all the water from the western side of the Nottinghamshire coalfield and from Derbyshire is pumped up. Annesley colliery is now closed. Discussions are now going on between the National Rivers Authority, British Coal and other partners about its future.

Annesley colliery lies next to Newstead village—next to Newstead Abbey, the home of Lord Byron. It is an area where local authorities, led by governing borough councils, have made major changes. They are lifting and building the environment. Unless the issue of mine water is resolved—and resolved quickly—there will be real problems. The amendment before the House would secure that future. It would put some real commitments in the Bill.

I echo the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). The Minister has talked about the importance of the Coal Authority. Now that the Coal Authority has a chairman—and I understand that a chief executive will be announced shortly—it is essential that it is properly resourced and has adequate personnel to tackle these issues. At present, the feeling in coalfield communities is that the Coal Authority could be a lame dog—a dog that will not bark. Our amendment aims to back the Coal Authority and ensure that things happen in coalfield communities to give them a better future.

In the past, the Minister has argued—indeed, he may well use the same argument this afternoon—that the amendment would wreck the Bill and cause difficulties for the private sector. I do not believe that that is the case, because my discussions with the private sector suggest that it is anxious about privatisation. Private sector companies are anxious about the liabilities that might have to be picked up. I should be grateful if the Minister could confirm that he is talking to private sector companies about that issue.

We want a better environment for coalfield communities. Even at this late stage, the amendment should be accepted.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): This is an important amendment. I hope that the Minister is prepared to take it on board. He will recall that the issue was raised time and time again during the long Committee stage.

At one point, I explained to the Minister the situation that has arisen in my constituency as a result of the River Don being polluted by a colliery that closed down in the latter part of the 1960s. That is something which the community opposed over a long period, but it has been unable to get anything positive done. That could easily be the situation with many of the collieries which have already closed, and those which will close in the future, unless we have a similar amendment.

I draw the Minister's attention to a situation that occurred only a few weeks ago in my constituency. Once again, it illustrates the sort of situation that we may face time and time again in mining communities. The Worsbrough reservoir is fed by a beck that runs down the countryside from Silkstone. It is also added to by many abandoned mine workings.

One of those mine workings, the Stafford mine, which closed down many years ago, is the low point for many of the collieries around. It has pumped into that beck some 1.5 million gallons per day. In October 1993, British Coal decided that it would stop the pumping operation. That has had a catastrophic effect on the reservoir, because one of the local sewage plants also feeds into the reservoir. That is adding immensely to the problems in the reservoir which have been experienced by local anglers.

I wrote to the Minister on the issue. When Lord Strathclyde discussed the amendment in the other place, he made the point that problems such as that at Worsbrough reservoir would become high priorities. Therefore, it is essential that the Minister tells us today whether he is prepared in circumstances such as we face at Worsbrough to give a direction that the pumping should be restarted. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether he will give a direction that the pumping should be restarted at the Stafford colliery to alleviate the problem in Worsbrough reservoir.

I should also point out to the Minister that this morning we received a letter from the National Rivers Authority stating that it was prepared to spend £35,000 on aeration equipment to try to alleviate the problem. However, that will by no means ease the problem, because the reservoir is also the source of the River Dove in Yorkshire. As the reservoir becomes polluted, so does the River Dove. It is essential that we have aeration equipment, and that pumping is restarted at the Stafford mine.

I hope that the Minister will tell us that he is prepared to accept the amendment, and that pumping operations will be restarted at the Stafford colliery.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I should like the Minister to deal with one issue in respect of

environmental liabilities. When we are talking about flood water, it is easy to see what the specific problems are. The particular problem to which I wish to refer is now becoming commonplace throughout coal mining areas, particularly in Stoke-on-Trent, North. It is the issue of mine shafts and adits. The problem is not quite subsidence, and is not easily visible. It seems to me that the problem has come about as the result of a specific disagreement between British Coal and the Law Society.

Some time ago, British Coal had an obligation to say whether there was a former mine shaft within 5 m of a property, although 5 m was never specified. It seems that there is now a voluntary agreement, under which, if there is a mine shaft within 20 m of a property, British Coal has to disclose the fact. Only since the property market has started to move again and the new arrangement came into force have we begun to understand the extent of the problem in Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire. Many houses currently on the market have been blighted simply because British Coal has said that there is a shaft within 20 m of the property.

In his reply on the overall environmental liabilities, I should like the Minister to deal with the issue of mine shafts. How is it anticipated that the costs of searching for mine shafts will be met? Anyone who bought a house before the new agreement came into force had no idea that British Coal would come up with the information that there was a mine shaft within 20 m of the property. I understand that the cost of carrying out the search amounts to about £800. I might add that the search is a fairly dangerous undertaking.

When we talk about transferring costs from British Coal to the new authority that will take its place, we must make certain that, at the heart of the legislation, we ensure that the costs of identifying former pit shafts, adits and so on has been met. People—many of whom have given their lives to the coal industry—must not find themselves with a property which they cannot sell, simply because they fall within a 20 m rule. I can well imagine the Minister saying that the matter might in some way impinge upon the regulations which relate to subsidence, but the technicality of it is that those mine shafts are not quite the same thing as subsidence.

4.30 pm

We need an undertaking from the Minister today that, if we do not get the matter sorted out as we reach the final stages of the legislation, he will consult the Coalfield Communities Campaign and local authorities to make sure that individual home owners do not have to meet those enormous costs. They must not be prevented from moving on and selling their homes. We are talking about contaminated land and about a legacy of environmental dereliction, and I want some firm assurances from the Minister today in that respect.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I apologise to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) for not being here when he opened the debate, as I was on my way back from an engagement in my constituency.

As hon. Members have said, this matter has been argued in this place, in Committee, on Report and in the other place. I say to the Minister that the issue between us—which is addressed in the Opposition amendment tabled by the Labour Front-Bench team and signed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and myself on behalf of our party—is whether the undertaking given in the other place is written into the Bill, and is not left as mere words uttered in debate in Parliament.

The key issue is to make sure that the liabilities are perceived to be liabilities which do not lead to risks arising unintentionally on people who cannot bear them. Do the Government have a clear policy about the issue in relation to their privatisation of energy? For example, is the attitude evidenced by the amendment in the name of the President of the Board of Trade intended to be a precursor to a similar attitude in relation to the nuclear industry? What is the Government's policy towards risk arising from environmental liabilities on privatisation?

The difference is simply that the President of the Board of Trade and the Government have came to the House and asked us to accept something which says that they think that the risk should arise

"except where it is reasonable to believe that that person . . . will be able to finance their discharge."

That is the only time when the transfer of liabilities will carry that guarantee. It is an objective test, and the Minister will know the difference between one and the other is the difference between an objective test and a subjective test. The "reasonable to believe" test introduces a characteristic that is a lesser protection than that which was put into the Bill in the Lords.

People clearly want the best protection against environmental risk, and I hope that the Government will accept that there must be the best protection. Whether the Government think that protection should reside with the Coal Authority—as is argued from the Opposition Benches—or somewhere else, I hope that they are consistent with what they always say elsewhere, and that the best environmental protection will be guaranteed.

Therefore, if that is the case, there is no argument but that the amendment passed in the Lords should be the amendment sustained. The Government amendment, which weakens that provision, should not be adopted by the House.

Mr. Skinner: My view is that, if the Government do not do anything about water pollution, it will be a disaster waiting to happen. It might not happen next week or even in a couple of years, but in three or four years somebody will ask what we were doing in Parliament to allow this to happen.

My mind goes back to Aberfan. We had a nationalised industry at that time which meant that we could do things in an emergency. But Aberfan was a disaster, and people asked what was going on. As everyone knows, they piled up all the stuff on top of a mountain and more than 200 kids in the village school were swamped. Fortunately, because it was under public ownership, a direct grant for clearance programmes could be set in process. We had such a slag heap removed in Clay Cross when I was on the local authority.

Under private ownership, the potential owners of 19 or 20 pits will not carry the can for such problems. When Silverhill colliery next to my constituency was closing, I was told that every pump used to pump water out of the pit cost £5,000 a week to run. That is a lot of money, and I think that Silverhill colliery has two pumps.

All my colleagues and others well versed in mining procedures know that that amount can be multiplied countless times in every coalfield, given the amount of

[Mr. Skinner]

pumping that went on. In Derbyshire, for instance, there are no pits left. I believe that one pump is operating at Creswell colliery for the whole of north Derbyshire. It is laughable.

The net result is that the water is rising at Bolsover and a land slip has already occurred. Six houses have been demolished. British Coal and the Department of the Environment say, "It's nothing to do with us." But six people have lost their houses and many more are placed in jeopardy. We want £1,500,000 from the Government so that the county can start a drainage scheme. That kind of thing will be the pattern in every coalfield.

Some people may argue that that is relatively clean water, but what happens in areas where the water is polluted? Those of us who are old enough remember the days before public ownership. I would have my earhole belted because I used to jump over little streams which we used to call "ochre water" because they were a dirty yellow colour. The water poured off the tips of privatised pits. That is the sort of feature that will occur in future.

The Government send people to Rio and all those environmental conferences, but do not care tuppence about the environment when it comes to the test. They have dogmatically pursued their privatisation scheme without thinking it through and now they have a problem.

Remarkably, in a series of votes today, Labour Members of Parliament will support amendments on the side of country landowners—they are involved in trying to save the property, whereas we are doing it because we know that it is morally right—while the Tories will go into the Lobby to attack their own people. The issue is not just about playing partisan politics. It is about the morality of allowing all that pollution to take place, as my hon. Friends have said over and over again.

Nuclear power gets £1.3 billion. We think that it is for production purposes, but the Government tell us that it is for decommissioning—for what happens after the production process. Is what we are discussing the same as the nuclear argument? We are asking who will clean up the mess once the production process has been completed. The decommissioning of the coal mining industry is the same argument.

We are told that the Government must find up to £22 billion in the next several years to decommission all the nuclear power plants. We are not asking for that kind of commitment today. All we are asking is that the Government come to their senses and understand that there will be major environmental pollution in every coalfield in Scotland, Wales and England. It is time that they accepted the morality of the amendment, which will go a little way towards resolving the problem, not for today or even next week, but for generations to come.

Mr. Eggar: I am sure that the House will not misunderstand me when I say that this is a re-run of a re-run of a re-run of a re-run of previous debates, and that there is a fundamental difference of view between Conservative Members and Opposition Members.

It is straightforward. Opposition Members believe that the Coal Authority should be responsible for all liabilities, even liabilities that arise in areas that are owned by private sector coal companies. Conservative Members say that the Coal Authority should have responsibility for all liabilities except those that arise in areas that are the responsibility of the private sector.

We debated the issue in Committee, at the very beginning. At that stage, I was able to put several hon. Members' anxieties in perspective, at least, and I firmly established that the Coal Authority is responsible in the vast majority of cases. It will, in practice, be an exception for a private sector mining company to have responsibility; the exception will be where it has purchased the assets.

Much as I enjoy the contributions of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—this time as ever—I think that he did not recognise that fundamental position.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the Minister for telling us what he told us in Committee, but he is still missing the point—that, where there is no licensed operator, in relation to deep mines from which coal is no longer extracted, the responsibilities and liabilities of British Coal end in limbo.

Mr. Eggar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bell: Perhaps, as the Minister says, they will become the responsibility of the Coal Authority.

Mr. Eggar *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bell: The Minister nods. The Opposition are arguing that it is not in the Bill. If he says that responsibility lies with the Coal Authority, why should he not now accept our amendment? Then we shall all know that it is in the Bill and that it is the responsibility of the Coal Authority, and we can all rest reasonably in peace.

Mr. Eggar: It emphatically is in the Bill, because the Coal Authority, under clause 73, takes over the ownership of all unworked coal and coal mines, including all abandoned mines. I can therefore assure the hon. Gentleman that it is absolutely clear that, where the private sector does not own the assets, the liabilities and such assets as there are are transferred to the Coal Authority.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) seemed to me to be identifying the core point, which is about the resources—funding and manpower—that will go to the Coal Authority. I attach much importance to that, and I have very much taken on board the points that he made.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned a specific, important matter in his constituency, and I will write to him about that.

Mr. Dalyell: Scottish law is slightly different. The highly competent Lothian river purification board and its officials, such as Mr. William Halcrow, do not know where responsibility lies. Will the Minister give the undertaking that one of his expert senior officials in Scotland will sit down with the board's officials and consider what is an urgent ferruginous pollution problem?

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Gentleman makes a specific request of that nature, I undertake to pass on his anxieties to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and to ask that the problem be investigated at a senior level and that, if possible, a satisfactory outcome be reached.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) raised a specific point about mine shafts' interrelationship with the Law Society. It will become the responsibility of the Coal Authority, as I understood the thrust of her remarks, and I will ensure that it tackles that specific issue because I have not come across the specific

issue of "undiscovered" mine shafts before. I am grateful to her for mentioning it, and I will ensure that we follow that up.

Finally, I think I signed a letter to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) at the weekend. I am sorry that he has not received it, but, from memory, I think that active negotiation and discussion is going on between British Coal and Yorkshire Water Services Ltd. British Coal acts as agent for Yorkshire Water at present, and discussions are going on about the way that the issue should be handled. The hon. Gentleman should have my letter soon. I am sorry that he has not received it yet. I hope that that will set his mind at rest.

We accept the basic thrust of Lords amendment No. 1, although the precise wording might give rise to problems —it would introduce some uncertainty as to whether the Secretary of State had discharged the obligation. We have therefore proposed Government amendment (a). I understand that the proposer of the Lords amendment accepts that our amendment meets the fundamental point that he wished to address. I think that it is more precise, and I therefore hope that it will be acceptable to the House.

4.45pm

This is a familiar debate. I am sorry that I cannot be more forthcoming than I have been able to be on previous occasions. I am convinced that the Coal Authority will discharge its liabilities appropriately, and that the anxieties that have been mentioned by many Opposition Members have been—

Ms Walley: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. May I make certain what he proposes in answer to my point—that he will ensure that he meets all those people who have expertise about the problem, and that we can have meetings to discuss the issues that I brought to his attention?

Mr. Eggar: I cannot give the hon. Lady a firm pledge that I personally will be involved in the meetings, as I am sure she will understand. I am sure that my officials are aware of the matter, but I personally am not. I understand the origin of her concerns, and I will ensure that the matter is inquired into. If there are what I would call "loose ends" to it, I shall do my best to ensure that they are sorted out.

I hope that, with that assurance, the Opposition will withdraw their amendment.

Mr. Bell: I have no intention of withdrawing it. Clause 73, to which the Minister drew my attention, deals with interests, not obligations. It deals with coal that is in the pits which may be used again by the Coal Authority, but not the environmental liabilities about which we have spoken.

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 282.

Division No. 273] **[4.47 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Horden, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Lords amendment accordingly disagreed to.

Amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 2, after clause 22, to insert new clause—*Designated mining museums—*

". The Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament a report on the administration of the financial assistance provided by him for coal mining museums during the period of three years following the restructuring date, within six months of the end of that period."

5 pm

Mr. Eggar: I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this we may consider the following Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 2: After clause 59 insert the following clause:—

'. As soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the period of three years beginning with the restructuring date, the Secretary of State shall prepare and lay before Parliament a report setting out particulars of—

(a) the financial assistance provided during that period to coal-mining museums, so far as it has involved the making of payments for that purpose to any person by the Secretary of State;

(b) the manner in which the provision of that financial assistance has been administered; and

(c) the use to which that financial assistance has been put by the coal-mining museums which have received it.'.

Mr. Eggar: Although the Lords amendment reflects an agreement that had been reached regarding its objective, we stated in the other place that we would come forward with our own wording. That is the reason for the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

A number of hon. Members present will remember the debate on mining museums some months ago. There were discussions following that debate, and on 9 June my noble Friend the Minister of State told the other place that we would make available transitional funding of some £900,000 over three years, and that that funding would be made available to the Yorkshire and Scottish mining museums and the Big Pit mining museum in south Wales. That will replace help in kind currently provided by British Coal.

It is fair to say that the announcement by my noble Friend has been widely welcomed, as has the gist of the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend. On that basis, I hope that the amendment will be acceptable to the House.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The Government amendment represents an attempt by the Government to correct what they considered to be shortcomings in the amendment voted on in the other place; our misgivings derive essentially from its caution.

Although the three-year commitment is far too short, we recognise the distance that the Government have moved since we originally debated the issue in Committee. At that time, the Government were in large measure indifferent to the plight of the museums and did not properly appreciate the scale of the contribution made to them by British Coal. They have moved a considerable distance since then, although probably not far enough.

The Government have identified the three main museums—the one in Yorkshire, the one in Scotland and the Big Pit in south Wales. There may well be others which deserve assistance but which the Government have not seen fit to support on this occasion.

Ms Walley: One museum not so far included in the list is Chatterley Whitfield museum in my constituency, which, as the House knows, has already closed. Urgent discussions are taking place with a view to establishing whether there is any way in which Chatterley Whitfield could reopen and whether part of the national coal collection could come back to Chatterley Whitfield as part of the operations that the Charity Commission is considering. It is important that Chatterley Whitfield should not be excluded from any discussions because it may be in a position to reopen at some stage in the near future.

Mr. O'Neill: The whole House knows the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed on a number of occasions over the Chatterley Whitfield mine. It is perhaps significant that, although the Minister referred to three mining museums, the amendment makes no mention of a number. I hope that that leaves the door open for some discussion.

We have one misgiving in particular about the formula that the Government have reached. The role of local authorities will be quite central to the future success of the mining museums, but this is a time of great uncertainty for local authorities; we do not know what the boundaries will be or what responsibilities local authorities will have after the Government's programme of changes and reform.

We recognise that the Government are probably making the best of a bad job, but the amendment none the less marks a sizeable achievement on the part of the people, the organisations and, in particular, the local authorities that have campaigned to secure a future for the museums.

Coal mining museums represent a substantial repository of the industrial and cultural heritage of our mining communities. We want them to continue. We believe that, at the end of the three-year period, their success will be such that the Government will be well advised to provide the necessary support to enable them to thrive and expand.

We give the amendment grudging and limited support. We do not say that with any malign intent, but had the Government been forthcoming earlier, we might have been spared a great deal of the anxiety that has been expressed on these matters by Members of both Houses.

We pay tribute to those in the other place who were able to secure a majority for a proposition that did not receive majority support in this House, and we recognise that the assurances given by the Government have in large measure been met by the amendment. The proposal does not go as far as we would like, but we are pleased that we have achieved some concessions. We shall wait with interest to see what form the report will take, because in three years' time it will be delivered to a Labour Government who will be more sympathetic to the plight of the museums and more likely to encourage their future success when the opportunity arises. For those reasons, we are happy to give the amendment our backing.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): One or two hon. Members will recall that I tabled a new clause on Report dealing with the issue of mining museums. I have a particular interest because the Yorkshire mining museum is in my constituency. There was great concern that no

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

consideration had been given to the future assistance for that and other mining museums on the back of what had previously been provided by British Coal. I welcome the fact that successful efforts were made in the other place to change the Government's mind. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that it is a welcome move.

I want briefly to pay tribute to those in the other place, from all parties and from none, who were very much involved in lobbying the Government. I want also to pay tribute to those from Yorkshire who worked very hard to bring about the Government's change of mind. I must also mention Dr. Margaret Faull and her staff at the Yorkshire mining museum. They have kept everyone effectively briefed on the predicament faced by that and other museums. They worked long and hard and they will have gained some crumb of comfort from the success in the other place.

I should be glad if the Minister would deal with the distribution of the funding. The proposal is for £100,000 per year for each of the three museums. That distribution is a little unfair as two of the three museums include an underground element that adds to their costs. I hope that the Minister will discuss the matter with the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, who has just walked into the Chamber; he has been very supportive.

I echo the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan about what happens after the three-year period has elapsed. We want a guarantee that the museums will not face a death sentence and that attempts will be made to secure funding, from whatever source, so that they can continue to play a valuable role.

As I said, we welcome the Government's change of mind. We are not entirely satisfied but at least the amendment represents a move forward on an issue of great concern in my constituency and elsewhere.

Mr. Hardy: I do not have a museum in my constituency, but I have long been interested in the history of the mining industry. For the greater part of the period from 1850 to 1950, about 1 million men were engaged in the industry. Before 1850, hundreds of thousands were. The impact of the industry on the social and economic history of our country—especially in the numerous coalfields that existed, some of which still exist—is such that the historic importance and relevance of the industry and its legacies must be retained. For the Government to turn their back on the museums in three years' time would be an act of crass philistinism.

I ask the Minister to assure my hon. Friends who have museums in their areas that the museums' maintenance will be encouraged because of the historic and educational importance of that inheritance.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I, too, welcome the fact that funding is being made available to ensure that the three mining museums maintain their present role. I pay tribute to those who have visited the Yorkshire mining museum at Caphorse colliery. The Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage and several noble Lords who spoke on the matter in the other place visited the underground mine and appreciated its great educational benefits. I am sure that it is one reason for their support.

5.15 pm

However, some significant limitations must be dealt with. There should be some relationship between the distribution of the grant and the help in kind that the museums received from British Coal. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) has my support in his contention that, although the even distribution may represent parity as between Scotland, Wales and England, it does not represent parity in expense. I hope that that part of the proposed report referred to in Government amendment (a)(c)—

" the use to which financial assistance has been put"—

will relate to the help in kind given by British Coal to the museums. The grant should replace that help.

The original proposal was for the report to be delivered six months before the end of the three-year period. The amendment changes that to

"As soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the period of three years".

I hope that that will not cut out any extension of the grant should that be necessary. I am sure that each of the museums will work hard to attract sponsorship to provide the money that they need. If the distribution of grant is even, the Yorkshire mining museum will have to find an additional £70,000 from year one because previously it received help in kind from British Coal of £170,000 a year.

This is an important issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) referred to what a future Labour Government would do. I am a member of the board of trustees of the Yorkshire mining museum—a non-pecuniary interest—and I shall ensure that the other members are made aware of my hon. Friend's comments.

The Caphorse colliery began in 1791. It existed at the time when Mozart died. The grant will help to ensure that it continues to exist. However, that must amount to more than three additional years of life.

Mr. Eggar: I am sure that the trustees of the Yorkshire mining museum will want to hear what the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said, but the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) might have a view on such spending commitments should the unthinkable happen.

I do not wish to mislead the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), so I must tell her that I cannot hold out any realistic hope of assistance for Chatterley Whitfield.

On the points about the division of funds between the three museums, quite frankly whatever way we had decided to divide up the available money would have attracted criticism. Arguments were put on behalf of each museum, but we felt that the best practice would be to allocate the same to each of them. I am sorry that some museums feel hard done by, but I feel that that is the best way to do it.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment accordingly disagreed to.

Amendment in lieu of Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 3 agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to [one with Special Entry].

Schedule 5

PENSIONS PROVISION IN CONNECTION WITH RESTRUCTURING

Lords amendment: No. 17, in page 102, line 29, after ("by") insert

("or in accordance with the directions of")

Mr. Eggar: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 18 to 22.

Mr. Eggar: This series of technical amendments relates to pensions provision. Let me record my thanks to all who have been involved in discussions about the pensions issue —the trustees of the many schemes and all who have worked to assist them. I also thank the Opposition formally for the co-operative way in which they have approached the debate.

I think that there was always a genuine worry, shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, that a technical but emotive issue would enter the political arena in a way that would upset many elderly pensioners for no good reason. The mining industry as a whole—unions and trustees—and hon. Members on both sides of the House have co-operated to bring about an outcome that is satisfactory from all points of view, without upsetting pensioners.

Mr. O'Neill: I join the Minister in thanking the trustees, who devoted considerable time and effort to wide consultation on the nature of the changes. When they went to Ministers, those Ministers had to heed what was being said, because pensioners, beneficiaries, trustees and others had a strong case to make. Ministers recognised that, and the necessary changes have been made—to the general appreciation, although not necessarily the overwhelming satisfaction, of most people.

Some 97 per cent. of members of the scheme are now beneficiaries, and a very small number are still contributors. It is therefore essential that proper provision be made for the long term. As I have said, it is to the trustees' credit that consensus was established: the arrangements were sold to the Government in a constructive way, and our constituents who are beneficiaries can now look forward to the future with far more certainty than they could when the Bill first appeared.

The Opposition pay tribute to all who played a substantial part in trying to make this section of the Bill benefit people who have made a great contribution to a once great industry, and to the economic well-being of the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 23, in page 102, line 50, leave out sub-paragraph (4) and insert—

("(3A) The modifications of an existing scheme that may be made by regulations under this paragraph shall include modifications making such provision as the Secretary of State considers appropriate for cases where either—

(a) there are assets of the scheme representing a relevant surplus, or

(b) the assets of the scheme are insufficient for meeting pension obligations under the scheme.

(3B) The modifications mentioned in sub-paragraph (3A) above may contain—

(a) provision for a relevant surplus, and the assets representing it, to be apportioned between—

(i) the part (if any) of the surplus which is to be retained in a reserve ("an investment reserve") as an asset of the scheme, and

(ii) the remainder ("the distributable part") of the surplus;

(b) provision for the management of assets representing an investment reserve and for the manner in which any such assets are to be applied;

(c) provision for income accruing in respect of assets representing an investment reserve to be added to the reserve;

(d) provision for the manner in which assets representing the distributable part of a relevant surplus are to be applied; and

(e) provision, for the purposes of any provision under paragraphs (a) to (d) above, for modifying any decisions as to the way in which relevant surpluses determined as at times before the restructuring date, and the assets representing any such surpluses, are to be treated.

(3C) The provision as to the apportionment of any surplus or assets to an investment reserve that may be contained in modification made by virtue of sub-paragraph (3A) above shall not include any provision authorising the allocation to such a reserve of any part of a surplus determined as at a time after 31st March 1994, or of any assets representing any part of such a surplus, except where the allocation is made for making good amounts that would have been comprised in the value of the reserve if assets representing any part of it had not been applied from the reserve in meeting a deficiency that arose as at any time by reason of the other assets of the scheme having been insufficient as at that time for meeting pension obligations under the scheme.

[Mr. O'Neill]

(3D) The provision as to the application of assets representing an investment reserve that may be contained in modifications made by virtue of sub-paragraph (3A) above shall include provision for the Secretary of State to become entitled where—

(a) any such arrangements as are mentioned in sub-paragraph (5) below have been entered into in relation to pension obligations under the scheme in question, and

(b) the value of the assets representing the reserve exceeds the aggregate amount required for the purposes for which the reserve has been retained,

to assets of the scheme representing the amount of the excess or, where those purposes have ceased, the value of the reserve.

(3E) The provision as to the application of assets representing the distributable part of a relevant surplus that may be contained in modifications made by virtue of sub-paragraph (3A) above shall include provision for the Secretary of State to become entitled where—

(a) the surplus is one determined as at a time on or after 31st March 1994, and

(b) any such arrangements as are mentioned in sub-paragraph (5) below have been entered into in relation to pension obligations under the scheme in question,

to assets of the scheme representing no more than one half of the distributable part of that surplus.")

Amendment made to Lords amendment: In line 7 of proposed sub-paragraph (3C), leave out 'that' and insert 'which' (apart from any entitlement for which provision is made by virtue of sub-paragraph (3D) below)'.

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to [Special Entry].

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Schedule 8

Amendments of the Opencast Coal Act 1958

Lords amendment: No. 37, in page 117, line 29, at end insert—

("Terms on which orders to be exercised

.—(1) The owner of the interest against whom the compulsory rights order (in this paragraph referred to as "the owner") has been made shall be entitled to—

(a) payment on the basis of either—

(i) the open market value of the rights granted as would have been fair and reasonable if the agreement had been made between a willing grantor and a willing grantee, or

(ii) the compensation for the losses caused to him assessed in accordance with sections 17 to 23 of this Act,

whichever is the higher, and

(b) secure such terms, guarantees and other security from the person entitled to occupy the land in respect of which the compulsory rights order is conferred (in this paragraph referred to as "the operator") as are necessary to protect the owner from any loss, damage, claims or other costs related to the exercise of the compulsory rights order.

(2) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (a)(i) of this paragraph, the assessment of the open market value shall take into account—

(a) the basis on which the operator has entered into agreements with the owners of other interests to permit the working of the same coal deposit, and

(b) the basis on which the owners of other interests have entered into agreements with the operator or other mining companies for the extraction of coal on comparable sites.

(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (a)(i) of this paragraph, the fact that the operator is in or to be in, a special position by reason of his having secured the licence under Part II of this Act to the exclusion of others shall be ignored.")

Mr. Eggar: I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider the following: Government amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment, in page 126, line 16, after 'section', insert—

'(a) at the beginning there shall be inserted the words 'Subject to subsection (3A) of this section,"; and

(b)".

Government amendment (b) in lieu of the Lords amendment, in page 126, line 17, at end insert—

'(5) After that subsection there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(3A) Where—

(a) any compensation is payable for any year by virtue of this section in respect of any holding, and

(b) the amount of that compensation falls to be calculated in accordance with section 18 of this Act by reference to the market value of rights which, if the compulsory rights order were not in force, could not be conferred for that year or any part of it except by or with the consent of one or more persons who are included in the persons directly concerned but do not fall within subsection (3) of this section,

the entitlement to that compensation shall be apportioned, according to the extent to which those rights could not be conferred for that year or part of a year without their participation or consent, between those persons and any person falling within that subsection.

(3B) Subject to subsection (3C) of this section, the persons entitled under subsection (3A) of this section to a share of any compensation shall include persons whose participation in or consent to the conferring of any right would be required if the right were conferred at some time after the beginning of the year or part of a year in question; and any apportionment under subsection (3A) of this section shall take account of the length of the period for which any person is, during that year or part of a year, a person without whose participation or consent any right could not be conferred.

(3C) No person shall be entitled under subsection (3A) of this section to any share of any compensation in respect of any such easement or right as might give rise to an entitlement to compensation under section 31 of this Act."

(6) Subsection (4) of that section shall cease to have effect.

(7) Sub-paragraphs (5) and (6) above shall not apply in relation to any compulsory rights order confirmed before the restructuring date.

Calculation of compensation

15A. In relation to any compulsory rights order confirmed on or after the restructuring date the following section shall be substituted for section 18, that is to say—

"Calculation of compensation under section 17

18.—(1) The compensation payable for any year in respect of a holding to which section 17 of this Act applies shall be a sum equal to the annual borrowing cost for that year of the market value of the rights conferred by the compulsory rights order in relation to the holding.

(2) For the purposes of this section the market value of any rights conferred by a compulsory rights order shall be equal to the amount which, as at the date of entry, would (apart from the order) represent the fair market price, as between willing and independent parties, for the grant of those rights by a person entitled to grant them and for the period for which the order is to have effect.

(3) In calculating for the purposes of this section the fair market price for the grant of any rights, due allowance shall be made for any entitlement to compensation which may arise, otherwise than by virtue of section 17, under any of the provisions of this Act.

(4) For the purposes of this section the annual borrowing cost for any year of any amount ('the market price') is the aggregate sum which would fall to be paid in that year by way of payments of interest and re-payments of capital if the market price had been borrowed on the date of entry on terms which—

(a) required interest to be paid and capital to be repaid by way of the relevant number of equal annual instalments; and

(b) provided for interest on outstanding capital to become due immediately before the time for the payment of each instalment, at an annual rate equal, as at the entry date, to the rate prescribed under section 35(8) of this Act;

and in this subsection 'the relevant number' means the number of years for which, when it was confirmed, the compulsory rights order was to have effect.

(5) Nothing in section 17 of this Act or this section shall confer any entitlement to compensation in respect of the annual borrowing cost of—

(a) any amount representing the value of any person's interest in coal, or

(b) any amount representing the value of any opportunity arising by virtue of an interest or right in or in relation to any land to obtain or make use of any rights to win, work or get any coal.

(6) Where the period for which a compulsory rights order is to have effect is extended under this Act, section 17 of this Act and this section shall have effect in relation to the additional period as if the rights conferred for that period had been conferred by a new compulsory rights order."

15B. Sections 19 and 20 (additional annual compensation and special compensation for cost of removal) shall not have effect in relation to any compulsory rights order confirmed on or after the restructuring date.'.

Amendment to Government amendment (b) in lieu, leave out new section 15A and insert—

'Calculation of compensation

15A. In relation to any compulsory rights order confirmed on or after the restructuring date the following section shall be substituted for section 18, that is to say—

"Calculation of compensation under section 17

18.—(1) The compensation payable for any year in respect of a holding to which section 17 of this Act applies shall be a sum equal to the annual borrowing cost for that year of the market value of the rights conferred by the compulsory rights order in relation to the holding.

(2) For the purposes of this section the market value of any rights conferred by a compulsory rights order shall be equal to the amount which, as at the date of entry, would (apart from the order) represent the fair market price, as between willing and independent parties, for the grant of those rights by a person entitled to grant them and for the period for which the order is to have effect.

(3)(a) In calculating for the purposes of this section the fair market price for the grant of any rights, regard shall be had to any entitlement to compensation which may arise, otherwise than by virtue of section 17, under any of the provisions of this Act.

(b) Where the holding is subject to a tenancy under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, the fair market price shall be calculated on the assumption that the holding is available for occupation with possession and in any such case the fair market price shall be apportioned between the freeholder and the tenant according to the respective value of their interests.

(4) For the purposes of this section the annual borrowing cost for any year of any amount ("the market price") is the aggregate sum would fall to be paid in that year by way of payments of interest and repayments of capital if the market price had been borrowed on the date of entry on terms which—

(a) required interest to be paid and capital to be repaid by way of the relevant number of equal annual instalments; and

(b) provided for interest on outstanding capital to become due immediately before the time for the payment of each instalment, at an annual rate equal, as at the date of payment, to the rate prescribed under section 35(8) of this Act;

and in this subsection "the relevant number" means the number of years for which, when it was confirmed, the compulsory rights order was to have effect.

(5) Nothing in section 17 of this Act shall confer any entitlement to compensation in respect of the annual borrowing cost of any amount representing the value of any person's interest in coal.

(6) Where the period for which a compulsory rights order is to have effect—

(a) is extended under this Act, section 178 of this Act and this section shall have effect in relation to the additional period as if the rights conferred for that period had been conferred by a new compulsory rights order; or

(b) is terminated at an earlier date than the end of the period for which the order was made for any reason, the outstanding payments of the annual borrowing cost, being the outstanding repayments of capital and the payment of interest calculated in accordance with subsection (4)(b) of this section, shall become payable on the date of early termination."'.

Government amendments (c) to (m) in lieu of the Lords amendment.

Lords amendments Nos. 38 to 48 and No. 50.

Mr. Eggar: It is important to put the amendments in the right perspective. We are not discussing whether particular opencast developments are acceptable; that is a matter for the planning system.

My right hon. and hon. Friends recognise the concerns that have arisen about such developments and their environmental impact. As the House will know, Ministers have been reviewing the planning guidance—mineral planning guidance note 3—and have conducted a wide-ranging public consultation exercise. This afternoon, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning announced his intention—in the light of the responses that he has received—of removing the reference to the national interest in MPG3.

[Mr. Eggar]

I am sure that that announcement will be widely welcomed, and I consider it a useful clarification which will help to ensure that the guidance incorporated in what has up to now been MPG3 is seen to be fair by all parties. My colleagues will finalise the guidance as soon as possible.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I thank the Minister for alluding to answers given this afternoon. Presumably he means the answers given to two questions on the Order Paper. Can he —through his officials or his parliamentary private secretary—ensure that hon. Members can at least have sight of the answers, which must have been published by now and must be in the building somewhere, during the debate? This is clearly an issue central to the discussion that will follow over the next hour or so.

Mr. Eggar: I shall do my best to ensure that hon. Members have the text. The answer was given at 3.30 pm in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter).

Mr. Hardy: If the reference to the national interest is to be removed from MPG3, why do we have to maintain until the end of the decade the right compulsorily to acquire other people's land for the purposes of opencast mining? Presumably that right was introduced in what the Minister regards as the national interest. If the Government have recognised that the national interest has changed and are removing reference to it from MPG3, why do we have to go ahead with the compulsory purchase of private land by private business? It is completely hostile to the principles that are supposed to motivate Conservative Members.

5.30 pm

Mr. Eggar: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall address those issues as the debate moves on.

Mr. Gunnell: I understand that there has been a press release this afternoon. It might be helpful if hon. Members could see the comments that have been made, as they may range a little wider than the answer to the parliamentary question.

Mr. Eggar: I shall do what I can to ensure that the text of the answer is available. It might be for the convenience of the House if I try to make arrangements for it to be placed in the Vote Office. I apologise for its non-availability. I understand the concern.

Lords amendment No. 37 provides for compensation based on market values. We have accepted the principle that lies behind that amendment, but we have sought to table a practical and effective replacement for it.

Our replacement amendment makes it absolutely clear beyond any shadow of doubt that the assessment of market value must be based on the fact that the nation owns the coal. We believe that the amendment should not in any way transfer the value of the coal to the landowner either directly or indirectly. Our view on that is absolutely clear.

That is why we have some reservations about the amendment to our amendment (b) in lieu, tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). The effect of the omission of subsection (5)(b) of our amendment is to transfer a considerable amount of the value of the coal to the landowner. We have always made it clear in discussions on this issue that the coal belongs to the nation and not the landowner. Although we have always been open to discussions about a fair market value for the surface land, we have not been willing to discuss, as part of the Bill, the transfer of the value of the coal to the landowners.

Other differences between the amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside and for Harborough relate to the way in which the annual payments are calculated. We have gone for a fixed rate of interest rather than a variable rate. We think that that is more straightforward. Given that the average length of time involved in such activities is about six or seven years, that is not an unreasonable approach. Sometimes landowners will gain, and sometimes they will lose, as the variable rate rises and falls.

Another minor difference is that we have used the words "due allowance". The amendment tabled by my hon. Friends uses the words, "regard shall be had". Our calculation is much more precise.

It might be helpful if I put on record a number of important aspects. It is important to know that compensation will not be paid in respect of any interest in the coal simply because, as I have said, the landowner does not own it. It is firmly established that the coal in the ground, just like petroleum and some other special minerals, belongs not to the landowner but to the nation. That must be material to the determination of the market value of rights to occupy land for the purposes of coal extraction.

Equally, no compensation will be payable for any opportunity to win work or get coal arising as a result of interest in or ownership of the land. That is a straightforward consequence of the fact that the landowners do not own the coal. To do otherwise would devalue the ownership of the coal and could transfer a significant part of its value to the landowner. That part of our amendment is consistent with the principles established by the important decision of BP *v.* Ryder in 1988. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) referred to that in a previous debate.

There has been some discussion about whether the move towards a market value approach for compensation is likely to be more beneficial to the landowner. The annual payments under the existing code take account only of the existing use of the land, whereas the market value determined on the principles of the amendment would be capable of taking into account any alternative use of the land other than coal extraction, in so far as the alternatives might reasonably be thought to affect the market price of the rights to use the land.

The result of the move towards the market price is that we have lost some certainty. In reality, the compensation that is determined in individual cases may be better than under the old system, or it could be the same or may even be worse. That will now be a matter for the market valuation of those rights as determined in the light of the principles that I have outlined.

It is clear that the Government do not accept the amendments passed in the other place that relate to compulsory rights orders. Contrary to the view held by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), we believe that compulsory rights orders are properly controlled in that they are subject to the agreement of the Coal Authority. As an individual operator, one cannot insist on a CRO without

the agreement of the Secretary of State. That must be the right way forward. The CROs come to the end of their period automatically in five years. In the meantime we have agreed to undertake a joint valuation, together with other minerals, to consider the way forward.

The short answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Wentworth is that, if we do not have CROs in place, the existing right of the state to own the coal could be negated by a landowner who refused all reasonable offers to exploit his coal. I say "all reasonable offers" because of the severe restrictions on the CROs.

Mr. Clapham: The Minister talked about CROs running for the next five years. As he knows, the capacity of the deep mines is such that they can easily fulfil their contracts with the two generators. So why is there a need to maintain a capacity of 17 million tonnes of opencast mining when we should be looking to decrease that capacity to no more than 5 million tonnes? Surely, if we did that, there would be no need for CROs.

Mr. Eggar: Future projections of the level of opencasting are critically affected by the need to acquire planning permission, which has always been the effective regulator of opencasting. I am not caricaturing the debate in which the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) and others have been involved, but they see the planning procedure as the regulator of the amount of opencast mining. [*Interruption.*] Some activity on the Opposition Benches suggests that the answer to the question has been circulated.

Mr. Eric Clarke: The Minister says that it is for the planning authority to give guidance and, in effect, be the policeman of planning applications, but the planning authorities refuse many applications, only for them to be granted on appeal by the Secretary of State, particularly the Secretary of State for Scotland. It seems that applicants are given a nod and wink and told, "If you don't get it passed by the local authority, it will be passed by the Secretary of State." That is no way to run a country, and certainly no way to run the coal industry.

Mr. Eggar: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the outcome of some appeals. I do not have the statistics at my fingertips, but a considerable number of appeals are turned down. Most hon. Members, if not all, accept that we must have an appeal mechanism. They like the system when an appeal favours their constituents, but dislike it if the decision goes the other way.

The important thing is the change in MPG3—an area that the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South, as a fair man, will recognise that we have addressed in the national interest.

I hope that I have described the reasoning behind the Government's amendments, why the amendment tabled by my hon. Friends does not meet with our agreement and why we do not feel able to agree with the Lords amendment on CROs.

Mr. O'Neill: We thought that amendment No. 37 would enhance the Bill as it would go some way towards allowing deep mines to compete fairly with opencast by ensuring that opencast operators paid full compensation when obtaining compulsory rights orders to extract coal against a landowner's wish.

The criteria on which compensation should be based were not those adumbrated by the Minister, that somehow landowners have a claim of right to ownership of the coal —that is vested in the nation, which we accept—but, first, where a loss to business carried out on the land would arise; secondly, where other values resulting from undisturbed ownership of the land such as amenity and sporting use would be endangered; and, thirdly, that account should be taken of disturbance caused by opencast mining, including dust, noise and general disruption. As drafted, amendment No. 37 covered those factors by referring to the market price paid by operators for access to similar sites and the price paid by operators to obtain access to land on the same site owned by other landowners. Without such compensation, there is less incentive to reach an amicable settlement with landowners, and opencast coal production is given artificial assistance in production which is denied to other mineral extraction processes, including deep coal mining.

You will appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is a fair degree of cynicism surrounding the planning mechanism. We all know how, times without number, opencast developers have made applications in the certain knowledge that if they do not win with the local authority they will certainly win with the Minister, and that even if the application goes to a public inquiry the Minister will find in favour of opencasting. In some respects, it must be said that the national interest provision of MPG3 was largely meaningless and perhaps not the best way of proceeding.

5.45 pm

The Government say that somehow Lords amendment No. 37, which commended itself to Cross Benchers, the Opposition and the serried ranks of landowners, is unworkable and that therefore the Government amendments are necessary. They say that compensation should not be available for general disturbance. Many of my constituents have had to put up with opencast mining and have considerable experience of the disturbance caused by dust, noise and general disruption. Such disturbance often arises from the carte blanche that is offered by ministerial diktat to insist that opencast mining goes on and that no provision is made for the legitimate concerns that local authorities would seek to reflect in a qualified acceptance of a planning application. A local authority may choose not to reject an application out of hand but to impose controls that we would regard as a reasonable defence of people's rights, yet we are told that such controls are not necessary as they cover matters of a different character. We do not accept that that recognises the ownership of the coal by landowners. We recognise that in some instances compulsory rights orders will be necessary.

Under amendment No. 38, we recognise that they might be necessary for large operations and for markets that cannot be satisfied from another source. Coal mines adjacent to electricity power stations produce coal that needs some form of sweetening which can come only from other sources. More of our deep mines are being closed, for whatever reason, thereby denying access to reserves of coal with the sweetening potential. On occasions, it will be necessary to have certain opencast development. We do not rule out opencasting completely, but it must be subject to the most stringent conditions possible. That is the thrust of amendment No. 38. A landowner who has refused a reasonable offer for access to coal should have the chance

[Mr. O'Neill]

to protest, but we would not wish opencast to have an advantage over deep mining where all other things were equal.

The two amendments address several concerns that have been expressed throughout the passage of the Bill. There have been repeated references to and discussion of opencast, the problems that it creates and the difficulties that we have encountered with it in our own areas. Indeed, those concerns found a ready echo in the dying moments of Report stage, just before Third Reading, when Conservative Members almost rebelled. They went as close as they could to the brink, but then they fell back on their own side, into the arms of the Government. They had tabled the amendments, but we had to move them because they chickened out at the last moment. It would appear that this evening, at or even beyond the last hour—the amendment is starred and might not have been selected—another attempt is being made. Yet so far as I can see, one of the Conservative Members whose name is attached to the amendment is not even in the Chamber. I am sure that he realises that we have reached the appropriate stage in the handling of the Bill and that he ought to be in his place, but he still has not arrived.

We regret the Government's approach. We think that the House of Lords achieved a substantial improvement to the Bill which would have afforded a degree of protection far greater than the sop offered today by the Secretary of State for the Environment. We believe that opencasting will be a continuing and accelerating problem in the months and years ahead, especially with a regulatory authority as weak as the Coal Authority to look after this country's coal reserves.

For that reason, we oppose the Government's intention to disregard the Lords amendments and we give notice that at the appropriate time we shall go into the Lobby to resist it.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The rudeness of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) about my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) does him no credit, especially as my hon. Friend may well support much of what the hon. Gentleman has said. That is not the hon. Gentleman's best point. I should explain to him that my hon. Friend has been chairing two Committee sittings this afternoon. He has been to the Door of the House, but owing to other commitments he has been unable to be here, so I am afraid that the hon. Member for Clackmannan and other hon. Members will have to listen to me instead for a moment or two.

Mr. O'Neill: No gratuitous offence was intended, but it is up to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) to establish his own sense of priorities. On an issue of such significance, and at this stage in the passage of the Bill, I should have thought that his priorities would lie here rather than elsewhere.

Mr. Garnier: I shall not detain the House further by having a spat with the hon. Gentleman across the Floor of the House. I want to advance some arguments rather than to have a row, because those may produce some answers from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, a man whose integrity and intellect I respect and admire.

I shall deal briefly with the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside and myself to the Government amendment. It suggests a different form for new clause 15A. My first argument is about our proposed new subsection (3)(b) which, as hon. Members will see, would constitute an addition to the Government amendment. I shall not read it out, because it is on the amendment paper, but I shall explain why my hon. Friend and I—and, I dare say, others—find it of importance.

We note that the Government have still not addressed the concern for landlords where the holding is let. At present the compensation is due to the person who occupies the surface for farming—that is to say, the tenant—yet the compensation covers greater losses and interests in the land. A reference should be made to ensure that the market value is assessed on the basis of vacant possession, to recognise all interests and to apportion between the landlord and the tenant in relation to their interests. As I have opened my remarks in that way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it will not surprise you to hear that I am a co-opted member of the Rutland and Leicestershire committee of the Country Landowners Association, and sit on its parliamentary and legal sub-committee in London.

My second point relates to the proposed new subsection (4)(b), which deals with interest. Our complaint here—or at least, our concern—is that for compulsory rights orders covering seven years or more, the imposition of a fixed rate of interest from the outset could work unfairly. I acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Minister dealt with that problem to some extent, but when the market value is to be repaid in instalments over several years the payments should reflect the arrangements that the owner may have made following the making of the order. We suggest that interest should be paid at the rate prevailing at the time of each instalment.

My next point relates to our proposed new subsection (6). Again, I shall not read it out as it is on the amendment paper, but one can see that it is an enlarged version of the corresponding part of the Government amendment. Our complaint is that provision should be made for all outstanding sums to be paid if the order is ended early for any reason. In the open market the parties would accept such provision in their freely negotiated agreement, but that does not happen under the compulsory rights orders arrangements in the Bill. We suggest that the arrangements should be incorporated into the Bill to ensure that the person against whom the order is made is paid the full market value of the rights.

I now come to what may be the most contentious aspect of our proposals—our rewriting of the proposed new subsection (5). Our amendment sought to remove the Government's proposed new subsection (5)(b), which refers to

"any amount representing the value of any opportunity arising by virtue of an interest or right in or in relation to any land to obtain or make use of any rights to win, work or get any coal."

That flows from the preamble in subsection (5):

"Nothing in section 17 of this Act or this section shall confer any entitlement to compensation in respect of the annual borrowing cost".

I have a preliminary point to make about that: the English in proposed new subsection (5)(b) is impenetrable. I have been at the Bar since 1976, and a Member of the House for a little more than two years, and I suggest that the time has come for Parliament to pass legislation capable of being understood at a glance. It should not require the assistance of hot towels and hot drinks to disentangle the English. That piece of English is appalling, and the Minister would do well to ask for it to be clarified.

By way of background, I refer the House to what the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, Lord Strathclyde, said on Report in another place when dealing with the various sorts of compensation orders and the Government's attitude to compensation:

"One other obvious category of potentially reasonable request from the landowner would be for better compensation for disturbance. There may be some kind of disturbance which would be caused by the proposed workings and which is particular to the case. A request for extra compensation in such circumstances might well be reasonable. In fact, I believe that it would be eminently reasonable."

Here I interpose to say that I wholeheartedly agree. The noble Lord continued:

"A further factor I would mention is the possibility of alternative uses for the land. If the landowner has a good case that, but for the opencast development, he would be able to go ahead with a different kind of development he would naturally seek greater compensation. I believe that this is sometimes called 'hope' value.

I do not think that it would necessarily be unreasonable for the landowner to seek compensation enhanced by the 'hope' value of the land, although of course everything will turn on how realistic those hopes may be. But all these matters would have to be considered in the particular circumstances, and what I have said must be taken to be just an indication of what may be relevant matters."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 June 1994; Vol. 555, c. 1569-70.]

Unless I am being deeply obtuse, it appears that the Government's attitude to that aspect of the Bill has changed somewhat since it left the other place.

There is no dispute between the Government and myself over proposed new subsection (5)(a); the exclusion of the coal is understood. However, the assessment of the proper market value must take account of the purpose for which the order is made, and the physical effects of the exercise of all the rights, including the operations undertaken on the land. In other words, the assessment of value must take full account of the matters set out in sections 5(4) and 5(5) of the Opencast Coal Act 1958.

I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) is here. The factors set out in our proposed subsection (4)(b) would be taken into account by operators seeking access by negotiation, as they are supposed to do in the free and open market. To exclude such provisions will again disadvantage those who are subject to an order for the use of their land. We suggest that in an ideal world the Government's proposed subsection (5)(b) should be deleted.

6 pm

Lords amendment No. 38 is most important. Throughout the passage of the Bill, the Government have said that compulsory rights orders would be available only in the last resort and that an operator would have to show that an owner of an interest in the land had been unreasonable in refusing to negotiate the terms he had sought. There has been no requirement on an operator for him to show that there is a need for the coal under the land. The wish to work the coal appears to be enough.

The basis for compulsory rights orders is partly set out in the Coal Authority explanatory note. Amendment No. 38 seeks to impose strict conditions on the power to grant a compulsory rights order. Most important is the need to show that the relevant coal is needed to fill a market that cannot be met from elsewhere. If there is no need for a deposit of coal to be worked other than to profit the coal mining company, it cannot be right for any person to have his interest in the occupation of the surface confiscated from him. If there is no need for the coal and access cannot be negotiated, the company should look elsewhere.

If the Government cannot accept the amendment, surely it would be right to firm up the policy set out on page 29 of the explanatory note to make it clear that the powers are of last resort and that there is a duty on the operator to show that it would be reasonably necessary for the coal to be worked. It should be made clear that the owner can take all such steps as would normally be taken to obtain security in the performance of the obligations under the CRO.

Those are important issues which have not been set out adequately or clearly by the Government during the passage of the Bill. For the future benefit of those affected or those involved in the coal mining industry, these matters should be spelt out in the Bill or in the explanatory note. As my parting shot, I invite the Minister to see whether he can apply his mind and those of his officials to the need to firm up the explanatory note to make matters clearer. It is not my job to embarrass the Government and I do not intend to force my difficulties or dissensions to the vote. However, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bear in mind the landed interests of this country. They are the bedrock, in so many respects, of the Conservative party.

Mr. Redmond: When speaking on an earlier amendment, the Minister said that he had heard it all before, time and again. He could probably say the same about Lords amendments Nos. 37 and 38. However, if he had taken heed of what was said earlier, there would not have been so many Lords amendments. The tragedy is that the Government have refused to listen to Opposition Members when they have sought to give guidance and to protect the national interest.

This debate concerns landowners, but does that include people with gardens adjacent to roads that will be blighted as a result of heavy lorries moving along them if planning permission is given?

The Minister said that coal belonged to the nation. That is rich coming from a Government who have sterilised millions of tonnes of coal underground and who appear to be going for opencast, which is environmentally unacceptable. In my constituency, there is a piece of land that may be used for opencast. It is owned by British Coal and rented out to farmers. I would never want that piece of land to be used for opencast, irrespective of any amount of compensation given. The area has been blighted for many years as a result of coal mining activities. I hope that the Minister will take note of that point in relation to the amendments.

We asked earlier about the importation of coal. If we cut coal imports as well as the amount of opencast, there would be less need to talk about compensation as we could go back to extracting coal from the deep mines to which we are geared and for which we have the skills.

What is the interest of the general public? We talk about compensation for landowners, but we do not talk about compensation for the general public who will suffer as a result of the noise and pollution caused by heavy lorries. Will local authorities be compensated as they have to maintain the roads? The side roads and country lanes were not built for heavy vehicles, so they will obviously fall into disrepair. Landowners move from A to B along country lanes, so it is perfectly proper for the Government to consider the depreciation in the standard of roads when opencast takes place.

[Mr. Redmond]

I thank the Minister for making available to hon. Members the answers to two questions given by one of his ministerial colleagues. I hope that the Minister can clarify the following point. A local authority may have said in its long-term development plan that no opencast extraction will be allowed. Does the answer imply that if the local authority's long-term plan does not include opencast, opencast will be debarred for ever and a day? I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify that point. The answer also refers to proper protection for the environment. Does that mean protection for the public who live adjacent to opencast mining sites?

Mr. Simon Hughes: I rise to speak in support of Lords amendments Nos. 37 and 38. The Minister for Local Government and Planning made an announcement, which the Minister for Energy brought to the House. That announcement will be welcomed. I am grateful to the Minister's parliamentary private secretary for circulating copies of the answers displayed upstairs and in the Library at 3.30 pm. We do not yet have the new guidelines but today we have a trailer which deals with the one issue that was extremely controversial. It came up often in debates in which widespread opposition was voiced.

I know that there is also widespread opposition in the country. I have realised, when I have been in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, that the biggest single point that the local community groups campaigning against opencast have always argued is that their local applications should not be decided on a notional definition of the national interest. That point has come out in the advance notice of the guidelines, which we shall get in July. I welcome that.

A nuance in the announcement suggests that the Government did not think that that point altered the basis of planning decisions. I must say, looking at the guidelines as they were before, understanding the way in which inspectors work and seeing the way in which decisions were arrived at, that it was always possible for somebody to say that a national interest was involved, and that it did not matter how environmentally destructive opencast mining was, how good the quality of the agricultural land was or how much it would impact on the villagers. It is like the argument for nuclear power stations. I welcome those guidelines going.

The case for amendments Nos. 37 and 38 has been put simply and I want to reinforce it with two statements of principle and then specifically address the reason why I hope that the Minister will, on reflection, accept the amendments. I realise that he comes here with his brief written by his civil servants, that the President of the Board of Trade has told him to stand by the brief and that his discretion may be limited at this stage. However, I hope that he is a Minister of sufficient longevity in the Department of Trade and Industry—indeed, this may be his last opportunity—to show that he has the authority to throw away the brief and to say, "I have decided that the amendment carried with all-party support in the Lords, and moved from the Cross Benches, is an amendment to support." I challenge the Minister to stand up to the President of the Board of Trade and the civil service and to back the all-party coalition in the other place behind the amendment.

Clearly, the amendment was a good thing. We should remember that somebody could have said, no matter what the owner of the land wanted to do, "We shall override you and insist on the land being used for opencasting." Amendment No. 38 says:

"A compulsory rights order shall not be made or confirmed unless it is shown that it has not proved practicable to obtain the right by private arrangement because the owner has acted unreasonably and that"

— there is a second condition—

"the coal in the relevant land is required to supply a market which cannot adequately be met from other sources which are currently being worked or capable of being worked where a coal-mining company has secured all the relevant planning consents and has required the necessary interests in land, and"

— a third condition—

"the amount of marketable coal to be extracted as a result of the rights order being made exceeds 250,000 tonnes".

There are also alternatives to that. The Government, as has been said from the Opposition Front Bench by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), in the place of Lord Strathclyde in the other place, effectively said that the position as outlined in the amendment was perfectly reasonable and that they were willing to undertake it. This is another example of Opposition Members trying to hold the position attained by the Lords, which has said that it is not happy with the undertaking, that it wants something written into the Bill, and that it wants it to be clear—hon. Members are saying amen to that.

Those of us who want to see amendment No. 38 retained believe that it is wrong for legislation to permit land to be compulsorily acquired. I heard what the Minister said and I accept, understand and appreciate that we are talking about the land and not about the mineral rights. Ever since my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and I came to the House, in 1983—during that time we have both done our spokesmenship jobs on these issues —we have made it absolutely clear that we believe in coal remaining a Crown asset and a national asset and in it not being sold off. So there is no dissent between the Government Front-Bench spokesmen and us on that point.

However, we argue that there should be other conditions. First, one must ensure that, if there has been a reasonable reaction by the owner of the land, if he says that it is needed for agriculture, that there is a long-term agricultural programme or that it is high-grade agricultural land, or if it includes on its edge a site of special scientific interest or is part of an area of outstanding natural beauty, that should be taken into account.

6.15 pm

Secondly, and most importantly—this is where we reach the national test from the other side—a compulsory rights order cannot be permitted when the argument is made that the land is not needed for opencasting because the market can be met from other sources. The argument that has been made over and again from this side of the House and that was made in the previous debate from the Tory Benches—

Mr. Eggar: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that that precise wording "met from other sources" could mean from imports? Therefore, since all grades of coal can be imported, the effect of the amendment which he is supporting would be that compulsory rights orders could never, in practice, be implemented.

Mr. Hughes: The answer to the Minister's specific question is yes, of course it means from imports. When his

noble Friend in the other place said that he gave an undertaking that that was, indeed, the attitude that the Government would adopt, he clearly believed that that was a valid position to take. The debate in Nottinghamshire, in south Yorkshire, south of Leeds or in west Glamorgan, or in other places, about opencast mining would be relevant if the question was whether they would prefer the land to be ripped up or the coal to be imported. If that is the debate, let us have it.

Of course, it has to be a market which cannot be met adequately from other sources. For example, the best anthracite coal is from the Betws colliery in south-west Wales. Therefore, it could not be met adequately from other sources because the best source of that quality of coal is underground coal from an underground pit. If the planning inspector or the adjudicator were asked to rule—

Mr. Eggar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hughes: The Minister shakes his head, but that is exactly the case. One could have an evaluation of whether it was possible that the coal could be provided from elsewhere. The argument, put simply, is that it is often in the interests of the exploiter—the company—to go in and take opencast coal. However, first, there are plenty of pits underground which we ought to be using before that; secondly, opencast produces little work and little employment; and, thirdly, it results in such environmental destruction that often, for decades if not for ever, that countryside cannot be returned to its original quality and state.

The argument about whether we have deep-mined coal, imported coal or opencast coal involves the way in which we protect acres and entire sectors of the country from being at risk, as they still are, from opencasting. We know, because British Coal has made no secret about it, that it has designs on huge amounts of remaining open land in certain areas of the country. The plans are there, many of us have seen them and we know how many parts of our country are under threat. We believe that, to protect what was accepted in the House on both sides—I repeat on both sides—and by many Conservative Members, which was pushed almost to the point of rebellion, as the hon. Member for Clackmannan said, in the hope that it would be won in the Lords, we must accept the amendment. One of the most destructive forms of environmental degradation, endorsed by the Select Committees, is opencast mining. We either have to say that we believe in a mining industry and in supporting it and use the existing mining resources or we say that we are not worried about environmental destruction and, therefore, it may all be opencast in future.

The Government have gone far enough down the road of closing the pits and of not making use of the best assets that exist underground. Some of us want the Government to be firm and to say that they are prepared further to countenance that, as an alternative, the country be left open to rape, ravage and violation—often, it cannot be put right—in the interests of cheap coal. I urge the Minister to use his authority, to stand up for the environment and to ensure, at last, that we support what was agreed on both sides of the House in the other place a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I shall be extremely brief and I shall try to confine my remarks to within two or three minutes. I declare an interest, as a member of the Country Landowners Association, that, to the best of my knowledge, none of the land in which I have an interest is coal-bearing.

Obviously, I support the principle of privatisation, but if anyone is in any doubt at all about the sheer devastation of the countryside that opencast mining can cause, he should look at the speech made in the other place by Viscount Ridley, who spelled the position out very clearly. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) also touched on that point.

As for coal supply, when there is an emergency such as a war, it is obvious that we must have an Act like the Defence of the Realm (Acquisition of Land) Act 1918, and that of 1920. Unfortunately, those measures were incorporated into the Opencast Coal Act 1958. As the Minister has said, compulsory powers have rarely been used by either the Coal Board or British Coal. I am therefore extremely surprised to see them being made available to the private sector. While huge devastation to the countryside might be acceptable at a time of national crisis or when there is a critical coal shortage, it is certainly not acceptable when there is a world surplus in coal. Furthermore, the production of coal does not need special compulsory powers any more than the production of any other mineral.

The Minister in another place talked about the last resort and negotiations. When negotiations are taking place between a private operator and a landlord or a farmer, how can those negotiations be free and fair when, as Viscount Ridley pointed out, there is the sword of Damocles—the compulsory rights order—hanging over the landlord? Can the Minister comment on that?

I am concerned about the five-year period for the operation of the compulsory rights order. Surely, when a time scale is put on such an operation, there is frenetic activity during the last few months or weeks of the operation. The danger is that some of the larger private mining operators, such as Budge and Hanson, will want to ensure that they get the areas of potential opencast mining sorted out. There may well be intense negotiations, which would not be free and fair.

We are talking about a fundamental principle. Whereas it might make sense for compulsory powers to be vested in the state vis-a-vis a private operator, surely it does not make sense that those compulsory powers be carried over to a private operator. An important principle is at stake. The Lords amendments recognised—reluctantly—that compulsory rights orders could continue, but they wanted to tilt the balance more in favour of landowners. That is why I am sympathetic to them, and that is why I would like the Minister to answer those specific points.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I have participated in previous debates on opencast mining. I have said this before and I shall say it again: it does not matter what the Government do—they intend to dig as much opencast coal as they can get their hands on, especially in the north-east of England. If one lives in a Tory constituency, or if one is a Tory Member, one may get away with an appeal if one gets the ear of the President of the Board of Trade. However, if one lives in my constituency, which has never won an appeal, or in the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) or of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), one cannot win an appeal about opencast mining. Whatever is on the table does not make a blind bit of difference.

[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]

In Northumberland, we have applications galore. Indeed, at the last count, the county council had at least 15 applications for opencast mining. It goes beyond the imagination when one thinks that the Government are trying to convince us and the people out there that they are restricting opencast mining. I should like to hear hon. Members talk about the need for coal and the country's coal needs. It is not a question of what the country needs.

I know what the entrepreneurs who want to opencast will do with the coal: they will export it. They will put it on ships. A ship takes opencast coal abroad from my town. That is what the entrepreneurs will do with the coal. They are coming to this country because opencast coal is cheap. That is the idea.

I do not believe for one moment that this or any other amendment will make any difference to opencast mining and the Government's intention to restrict it. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said, the Government will rape and pillage wherever they can get the coal. Indeed, they would dig up my back garden if they thought that they could make a quick buck. That is the trouble with the Government.

I shall refer briefly to Ellington colliery because it has been mentioned with regard to deep mining. Ellington is the only colliery left in the north-east. We hope that it will reopen. We think that it will because the entrepreneurs have made a bid for not only the colliery but the opencast that surrounds the colliery. That raises a good question.

At present, Ellington colliery has two faces that could be manned and in production within a fortnight. Another face could be won out quickly and away within a matter of months. We also have the undersea reserves and the Amble seam with millions of tonnes of reserves. I must ask the entrepreneurs who are bidding for the colliery and the Minister whether the Amble seam will be developed. Will it simply be a case of raping the colliery, selling off its assets and then handing over the opencast mine so that it can be used, as was the original intention? If that is the case, it would be much better to shut the colliery and pull it to the ground, as the Government have done with every other colliery. That is what I believe the Government and the entrepreneurs are about. In Northumberland, all they are interested in is opencast mining—I shall be proved right before too long.

Mr. Hardy: I shall try to be brief, not least because the Minister has heard me speak on this subject on numerous occasions. However, there are some important points to make.

In the coalfield areas, there is bitterness because coal will be locked away for ever and our pits closed prematurely when two or three miles away someone will come along and make a considerable nuisance of himself on an opencast mining project that might take 10 years. We are talking about huge civil engineering exercises.

I have supported, and will continue to support, opencast mining where the dereliction that it causes does not present an appalling nuisance to people who happen to live in close proximity to the site. Any hon. Members who look at areas to the east of Sheffield will see some superb sites which have been opencast for the benefit of the local community. The exercise did not cause an enormous nuisance to the community.

In some parts of the country—my area is one—there are attractive green-field areas and substantial coal reserves which are accessible for opencast mining. However, opencast mining can take place in those areas only if it causes an enormous nuisance to people in the vicinity. We are talking about the capacity to go very deep. I believe that the deepest opencast mining site in the British Isles today is about 850 ft. Such a project must operate on a considerable scale and exist for perhaps 10 years. After the war, there were opencast mining schemes in my area which went down to 250 ft. We marvelled at that; we used to go and look at them. The area looks rather nice 50 years later, but farmers cannot grow root crops there. The range of agricultural activity is still, and will for ever be, restricted. I discussed this matter with farmers in my constituency only a couple of weeks ago.

I must ask the Minister to go a little further about the parliamentary answer that we were kindly given this afternoon. We have been given an assurance that such schemes will not go ahead unless they are environmentally acceptable—but environmentally acceptable to whom? Reference has been made to landowners, but who has made reference to local residents? If a landowner in my constituency decides that he will not sell his land or allow opencast mining to take place in response to the representations of his neighbours, who do not want to bear the banging, noise, nuisance and dust of an opencast operation, will he be regarded as acting unco-operatively or unreasonably?

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Some of the landowners in my constituency are trying to use opencast as part of the set-aside scheme that the Ministry of Agriculture operates. Opencasting is being promoted as a way of filling the quota of arable land taken out of production. Despite opposition from the whole community, opencasting will be allowed on green belt land. It is a serious problem, in which Government Departments are colluding so as to obtain benefits under the common agricultural policy. In that collusion, environmental matters are put completely to one side and the short-term gains from reaching targets for set-aside are put first. Unless the Minister gives a clear commitment that inspectors will not be allowed to use set-aside as an excuse, there will be large-scale, long-term opencasting in areas of high agricultural production for the purposes of taking land out of agricultural production at the expense of the environment and the community.

6.30 pm

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted that I was able to give my hon. Friend the opportunity to make that point. I should have thought that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would not allow people to gain a double benefit by obtaining a set-aside grant as well as money from opencast mining. That would seem to be a fairly simple thing and one which even this Government could control.

My hon. Friend might like to know that during the Minister's speech the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) kindly gave out the answer to a question of enormous significance. The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I again ask the Minister what is meant by the phrase "environmentally acceptable"? Does it mean what I hope that it means? Does it mean that the project has to be environmentally acceptable to the local community and the local authority? Does it mean that the Minister will no

longer overturn local authority planning refusals for opencast mining? I am delighted by this development. I wonder whether there is a slight chance that the suggestion that I made in Committee had some influence.

At the time of the Committee proceedings and subsequently, I contacted the British Geological Survey and asked a number of questions to establish where coal reserves were. I wanted to point out that opencast mining might not be entirely restricted to existing coalfields in future. The hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) blandly said that there was no coal in Norfolk. However, there are coal reserves along, and close to, the Norfolk coast. I am not sure where the boundary of the hon. Gentleman's constituency is, but perhaps he will not be there to defend it should someone come along to extract the coal.

I must tell the Minister that I took great care to find out whether there was any coal in the area around the home or constituency of the President of the Board of Trade. If there was, a number of people might be eager to set up a company, to be known as the Henley Opencast Mining Company, and to apply to Henley local authority to serve a compulsory purchase order on the President of the Board of Trade so that he could have the opportunity to experience the dust, noise and degradation that might well follow that exercise.

Unfortunately, at this point, I have been unable to find any viable coal reserves in Henley. However, those researches led me to establish that in the green-field areas in the constituency of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Oxfordshire and the constituency of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, there are such reserves. Perhaps the Minister's colleagues have taken the view that they had better insert the phrase "environmentally acceptable" in the Bill. I welcome the insertion, but we shall need some clarification from the Minister and his colleagues before very much longer.

Mr. Tipping: Opencasting has been a major theme in the debates on the Coal Industry Bill. I shall return to it briefly. Many of us are worried about the balance between deep-mined coal and opencasting. Perhaps, if I can catch the Minister's eye, he will listen to what the private companies have been telling him. Those companies which have pre-registered have seen the profit in opencasting, but there is a view among the potential private owners that there is no profit to be made from deep-mined coal. They believe that, in the central coalfield perhaps, there is no profit in deep-mined coal and the real profit lies in opencasting. Therefore, some of the private sector companies are falling away. Perhaps the Minister will comment on a rumour which is widespread in the industry that, in the light of that disappointment, documents have been sent out to companies such as Hanson which have not pre-registered. In the past they have not shown an interest, but they are now being encouraged by the Government to buy the industry. Will the Minister confirm or deny that rumour this evening?

I welcome the announcement this afternoon that national interest will not be taken into account in opencasting. That is significant for coal mining areas. It sticks in the craw of people in Nottinghamshire that our pits are being closed down at the same time as permission is being sought for opencast mining in west Nottinghamshire. That is the landscape of the Robinettes sites, the Cossall site and the Moorgreen site, that D.H. Lawrence loved or, as people put it, made love in. They are important sites which should not be destroyed. I hope that issues surrounding opencasting will be discussed and decisions made at local level rather than at national level.

Given the announcement made this afternoon, why will not the Minister accept Lords amendment No. 38? In the other place Lord Strathclyde said that compulsory rights orders would be used only in the most exceptional circumstances. Lords amendment No. 38 defines those circumstances. It limits compulsory rights orders. If the Minister still wants to make friends in coalfield communities, he will accept amendment No. 38.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I wish to make one point which was prompted by what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said. He said that we should dig up all the deep-mined coal and worry about opencast coaling afterwards. I must confess to a bias on the matter. When I was Minister for Coal I was alone one day in between Secretaries of State in the Department. I managed with the assistance of the admirable civil servants to sign the orders to liberalise opencasting and increase it to the present level of 250,000 tonnes.

The point I make to all those who argue against opencast coaling is that they should bear in mind that if we are truthful, we will admit that deep-mined coal in Britain, especially if one takes into account the environmental considerations such as the sulphur content and so on, is not truly economic under almost any circumstances compared with imports. That has been the position of the unions for many years. That is the truth of the matter if one takes into account the genuine cost of raising the coal and the total costs associated with doing so.

Mr. Clapham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spicer: In a moment. I wish to make one point. Then I will certainly give way.

The only way in which we can make British Coal in its wider sense competitive is by blending deep-mined coal and opencast coal. That is due to two factors. One is that opencast coal is mined at half the cost of deep-mined coal. The other is that opencast coal is sulphur and chlorine-free and, therefore, a clean form of coal. So if we are to have any competitive coal industry in Britain, there has to be an opencast coal industry.

Amendment No. 38 deals with a fairly marginal matter. Compulsory rights orders are not made very often. Nevertheless, people such as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey hide behind such amendments. They say that it would not matter if we accepted the amendment because what they really want to do is stop opencast coaling. They should be honest.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spicer: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham). Then I will certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Clapham: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that we are closing down collieries that produce at 88p per gigajoule, which is level with market prices? Does he agree that if we opencast for technical reasons such as sweetening because of chlorine content and so on, all that we need is about 5 million tonnes? I use that figure because when the Trade

[Mr. Clapham]

and Industry Select Committee examined the issue it suggested that opencast mining should be reduced to 10 million tonnes. That was within a market of about 60 million tonnes. We are now down to a market of 30 million tonnes, so all that we require is 5 million tonnes of opencasting. That would mean that we could tackle it in a reasonable manner and not need CROs.

Mr. Spicer: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is very knowledgeable about the details of the costings of British deep-mined coal. Suffice it to say, and without going into too much detail, that those costings are often not very transparent. If one takes, for instance, a pit such as Selby, the way in which the sunk capital is computed into the pricing and costings is very dubious indeed. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would dispute the fact that there are massive hidden costs within the industry which somebody will have to account for one day.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: The hon. Gentleman will remember that, when he was Minister, we had in the north east of England—if my memory is right—only 17 deep-mined coal pits. At least half of them took in opencast coal, and we did not argue against that. The hon. Gentleman was right when he said that it sweetened deep-mined coal. We do not have any deep-mined coal in the north east now but, by God, we have plenty of planning consents for opencast coal at the moment. It is sweetening nothing.

Mr. Spicer: The sweetening point is important, but the other important thing is the financial sweetening. Opencast coaling can be produced on average at half the costs of deep-mined coaling if we take into account the proper costing.

I make my point in response to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and in support of my hon. Friend the Minister. It is nonsense to say that there should be an amendment which in effect makes a CRO totally impossible—that is what the effect of the amendment would be—because of the undoubted value to this country of opencasting.

An obvious qualification is that it must be done properly from an environmental point of view. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) acknowledged that nowadays, in most cases, the long-term environmental effects of opencast coaling are being properly addressed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) made the point that there are occasions when there is an acceptable proposal for opencasting, and there are places in the country where proposals have been accepted.

The debate is that when there is not an acceptability within the local community, there can be a compulsory power to go ahead. In that case, there should be a test asking if there is an alternative. I understand that sometimes opencast coaling is needed, but the community must accept it.

Mr. Spicer: I do not want to prolong the debate, and I do not think that there is much between the hon. Gentleman and I on that point, except to say that there will perhaps be circumstances in which a CRO is appropriate. The amendment might make it completely impossible to introduce CROs and, for the reasons I have given, I think that that would be a bad thing.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There has been a massive run-down in the coal industry because of the fix in fuel market prices. It has always been my contention that if arrangements could be fixed, they could be unfixed later.

During the previous Session, I introduced a Bill which would have unfixed the arrangements. If I could do that, I am sure that the Government will be able at some stage to introduce measures which mean that the getting of coal is more economically viable than in the present circumstances. A massive resource exists throughout the country which will lead to fortunes being made by certain people. That will be done by opencast techniques which will have serious environmental consequences, as many hon. Members have stressed.

In my constituency, there is a stark distinction between the western and eastern sections. The western section is a rural area where mining goes back to the 16th century, and there was certainly a great deal of mining in that area in the 17th and 18th centuries. There are massive amounts of coal in that area not far from the surface.

The eastern side is where the pits were shut, and there are no pits left now in Derbyshire. In that area, the disgraceful activity of further opencast developments will take place, and already opencast developments have been accepted in those areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) referred to the parliamentary question which we managed to table, and he said that the Minister had kindly supplied us with the answer. I do not look upon the question in quite the same way as that. I think that it is disgraceful that a matter concerning opencasting should have been presented by planted answers.

6.45 pm

It came out at half-past three today, and nobody in the Chamber knew about its existence until the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) scurried along the Benches and dished out the pieces of paper so we could see the answer. I found out about it a little earlier because a Lobby correspondent met me outside the Chamber and asked me what my views were on the press release from the Department of the Environment.

When we have opencast provisions in the Lords amendments, and a whole series of Government amendments, the House should know in advance what the position is. Furthermore, I think that the answer tells us that the final guidance arrangements—the new mineral planning guidance—will be available to us only just before the summer recess. That is not acceptable. The House is considering Lords amendments and the Government's counter-proposals, and an argument is taking place on the planning agreement provision. That has knock-on consequences for what we think should be put forward in the legislation.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I must apologise to the House for the fact that I was called away to an important meeting for the last half hour, and I missed the beginning of this debate.

I think that the impression which might be created that the Opposition are totally opposed to opencast is not accurate. My experience of opencast in my constituency

goes back to the mid-1940s when it was essential to get coal to keep the war effort going. There was no opposition at that time, and it was recognised as a national issue that it was important to get that coal out.

The opencast exercise at that time was very crude. There is a golf course in my constituency which is on the remains of an opencast site which was developed in the 1940s, and it is impossible to play on. It is certainly impossible for me to play on, and I think that the condition of the ground is the problem, and not my playing.

When I was involved in local government in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we had an arrangement in my county council in Northumberland—which probably has the biggest potential opencast field anywhere in Britain —with the then National Coal Board opencast executive and then the British Coal opencast executive where there was a 10-year rolling programme. The executive came to the planning authority with proposals for projects which were 10 years ahead.

We then sat down calmly and talked through the proposition. We adjourned the meeting, and came back after three months to talk about it again. But we had a reasonable and sensible programme based upon the national target throughout those years of 15 million tonnes per year being obtained nationally from opencast. The matter was dealt with reasonably.

Obviously, there were problems. There were complaints and resistance to opencast sites being developed, but in general it worked extremely well. The real problem arose in recent years when freedom was given to almost anybody for opencast sites. One site was developed in my constituency a quarter of a mile from a pharmaceutical factory, and that caused all sorts of problems because of the environmental effects. There was even a mild threat that the factory would close because of the small opencast site.

That is the sort of problem which we are facing at present and which, in my view, will be aggravated by the privatisation of the industry and by the free-for-all which will exist in terms of opencast site development. We shall not have the right balance in terms of local or national interest. It will be a free-for-all and if someone can sell his coal at a lower price than the guy along the road, he will prosper. That is not how I want my county to develop.

I hope that the amendment will be accepted because it will ensure the right proportion of opencast coal mine development.

Mr. Eggar: I seem to spend a lot of time putting to rest scurrilous rumours which the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) mysteriously hears about and then repeats in the Chamber. His comments have no substance whatever. He knows perfectly well, because I answered a parliamentary question on the matter, how many people have applied for qualification. I assure him that no more information has been sent out to people who have not pre-qualified.

There have been two strands to this debate. First, a number of Opposition Members and one or two of my hon. Friends who have not spoken are basically anti-opencast. They are determined to use whatever mechanism is available to stop whatever opencasting may be contemplated. Secondly, my hon. Friends who spoke in the debate wished, in some way, to give landowners the value of the coal.

In fairness to the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), they recognised the balance and the fact that there is a place for opencasting, given the correct environmental and other controls.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) is very much involved in these matters. But it is for my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment to expand on the issues which he raised. He kindly recognised the fact that the debate had moved on as a result of the answer to the parliamentary question.

I was surprised at the point made by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). After all, the Government could easily have held this debate without making the announcement. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning and I thought that it would assist the House if we made that announcement, even though we could not make the full announcement on MPG3. Hon. Members, with the exception of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, who has not been present for most of our debates, will recognise that, throughout the discussions in Committee and subsequently, I have been extremely forthcoming with the documents and have always responded to requests from hon. Members on both sides of the House. It therefore annoys me to hear the churlish response that we have had from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Barnes: Could not we have had the answer 24 hours earlier, as that would have provided a framework for our discussion?

Mr. Eggar: The fact is that we had the answer in time for the debate. With the exception of the hon. Gentleman, all hon. Members present welcomed that.

Mr. Redmond: Does the Minister agree with the answer in relation to the document that has been discussed?

Mr. Eggar: Of course I agree with the answer given by my hon. Friend.

Some of my hon. Friends argued that more of the value of the coal should, in some way, accrue to the landowners. My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has followed this issue carefully. He was, however, less than objective in assessing how the Government have responded to the interests and genuine concerns of landowners. May I spell out exactly what we have done?

The power to initiate CROs no longer lies in the hands of the mining industry. In the future, it will lie in the hands of the Coal Authority. My hon. Friend did not recognise the fact that we have set out the intended policy of the Coal Authority to make CROs only in the last resort and after all reasonable efforts to obtain the landowners' agreement has failed. The Coal Authority will also ensure that any reasonable requirements for appropriate financial security are met. Once that has been done, the orders will be made, subject to confirmation by the relevant Secretaries of State. The Bill also sets out an absolute limit of 31 December 1999 for the continuation of those compulsory rights orders. At the same time, we have announced that we are initiating a comprehensive review of compulsory access powers for all minerals.

As if that were not enough, since the Bill's introduction we have accepted the principle that compensation should be based on market value. We have agreed that there should be notification of all applications for coalmining licences and the transfer of existing licences. We have

[Mr. Eggar]

introduced a mechanism to ensure that landowners can revert to the operator's best offer, even at the last possible stage, and compensation for non-coal minerals has been given in coalmining operations. So for my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough to say that we are not taking account of landowners' genuine interests is—I am being charitable—not putting the whole debate in context.

On my hon. Friend's comments on the drafting of the Bill, I agree that we should all strive for clear drafting. It is a technical matter that relates back to the 1958 Act. Although its clarity may not be ideal, it is more understandable than my hon. Friend led us to believe.

May I tell my hon. Friend bluntly that the Government have always made it clear that we shall not give the value of the coal to the landlords. The net effect of his amendment is that a significant proportion of the coal's value is likely, as a result of market negotiations, to lie with the landowners. It has always been made clear to my hon. Friend, representatives of the Country Landowners Association and others that we will not do that. I am sorry that he does not accept that, despite the fact that I have explained to him, and again in my opening speech, that that was the effect of his amendment.

I recognise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South about CROs. The absence of any CRO power, ahead of the review of compulsory access powers for all minerals, has the same potential effect in terms of giving additional value to the landowners. We have listened carefully to the landowners' wishes and consulted widely, but we have always drawn a bottom line. We are simply not prepared to go below that line.

I hope that I have dealt with all the issues that arise from the amendments and that we can now move to a Division, should that prove necessary.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 291, Noes 223.

Division No. 274] **[6.58 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim

Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Chwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendments in lieu of Lords amendment No. 37 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 38, in page 117, line 29, at end insert—

("Conditions to be satisfied before a compulsory rights order is made

. A compulsory rights order shall not be made or confirmed unless it is shown that it has not proved practicable to obtain the right by private arrangement because the owner has acted unreasonably and that—

(a)(i) the coal in the relevant land is required to supply a market which cannot adequately be met from other sources which are currently being worked or capable of being worked where a coal-mining company has secured all the relevant planning consents and has acquired the necessary interests in land, and

(ii) the amount of marketable coal to be extracted as a result of the compulsory rights order being made exceeds 250,000 tonnes; or

(b) there is a present likelihood that the coal will remain unworked on account of other development proposed on the relevant land; or

(c) the persons with power to grant the right, or any of them, cannot be ascertained or cannot be found; or

(d) the persons from whom the right must be obtained or any of them, have not the necessary powers of disposition, whether by reason of defect on title, legal disability or otherwise.")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 221.

Division No. 275] **[7.12 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*

Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert G. Hughes and Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put the remaining amendments together.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up a Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 38: Mr. Stuart Bell, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Mr. Martin O'Neill and Mr. Tim Eggar be members of the Committee; Three to be the quorum.—[*Mr. Eggar.*]

To withdraw immediately.

Ports (Northern Ireland)

7.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tim Smith): I beg to move,

That the draft Ports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 19th January, be approved.

I understand that it will be convenient for the House also to discuss the second motion:

That the draft Ports (Northern Ireland Consequential Provisions) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 19th January, be approved.

The orders reflect provisions already enacted in Great Britain under the Ports Act 1991. It is primarily an enabling measure, designed to offer a more efficient mechanism than currently exists for ports to privatise themselves.

The order would empower any relevant Northern Ireland port authority to submit a privatisation scheme to the Department for approval. The scheme would transfer all the property, rights, liabilities and functions of the port's undertaking to a successor company formed under the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

The order would provide powers for the Department to initiate a privatisation scheme for a port with an annual turnover of £5 million, index-linked, which has not itself submitted such a scheme within two years of enactment of the order.

It would require the port authority to pay the Government a 50 per cent. levy on the sales proceeds and it would empower the Department to vary the levy percentages on any gains from the disposal of land within 10 years of privatisation.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Reverting to the point the Minister made earlier, why is such a scheme not subject to an affirmative order in the House, as it is for the privatisation of trusts in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Smith: Because it would conflict with the constitutional position of the Assembly. It would create a difficult constitutional precedent. It requires an affirmative resolution of the Assembly, but here it would have to be subject to a negative resolution. In practice, if the Opposition were to pray against it at the appropriate time, there would be a debate in the House.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The Opposition spokesman has raised a fairly crucial point. Perhaps we could return to it on Thursday, when we debate the renewal of direct rule. We shall be debating and voting on the renewal of the Northern Ireland Act 1974. I hope that it is the ambition of the House to get rid of the 1974 Act as soon as possible.

Mr. Smith: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that I have described the current position accurately.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I apologise for interrupting the Minister so early, but could he help the blissfully naive? He referred to 50 per cent. of the proceeds being clawed back by the Government. Who gets the other 50 per cent.?

Mr. Smith: The other 50 per cent. goes to the company. That follows the position in Great Britain, so that half the proceeds would go to the Treasury and, subject to any costs which would be deducted first, and subject to any possible capital gains tax, half the proceeds would go to the company. That would be one incentive for privatisation.

Mr. Robinson: Is the Minister telling us that, if a company bids £50 million, or whatever the going rate for a port may be, they would have to pay only £25 million to the Government?

Mr. Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman repeat his question, as I did not understand it?

Mr. Robinson: If only 50 per cent. of the money from a private company purchasing the port goes to the Government, the other 50 per cent. effectively goes into the company's coffers. If a company bid £50 million, it would pay only £25 million to the Government.

Mr. Smith: Because there is no beneficial owner of the trust ports—the Trustee Savings bank is in the same position—the proceeds would go to the company, which would take that into account in deciding its bid. The position of trust ports in Northern Ireland is the same as it is for trust ports in the whole United Kingdom; there is absolutely no difference.

Finally, the order would provide powers to reimburse the costs incurred by a management-employee buy-out team in mounting a bid for the port undertaking.

The Department would issue guidelines for voluntary privatisation under the order. Those guidelines would provide that, in framing their objectives, ports should have regard to

"the desirability of encouraging the disposal of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital of the successor company to managers or other persons employed by the company."

While the guidelines will be concerned primarily with privatisation by trade sale, other methods are not ruled out. However, any such proposals must be agreed by the Department.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Gentleman mentioned functions to be carried out by the successor companies that are now carried out by the authorities. On the important activity of dredging, will a statutory obligation be placed on the successor companies to continue that function?

Mr. Smith: I shall check on that point. I think that the successor companies will inherit the responsibilities of the trust boards. I shall give the hon. Gentleman a full reply at the end of the debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I thank my hon. Friend for being so courteous in giving way to so many interventions. I assure him that the issue I am about to raise is the only one that concerns me, so I shall not trouble him further.

All the ports in southern Ireland are being stuffed with EC funding and subsidies. Does my hon. Friend believe that a private port company would have the same eligibility for EC funding as a public authority? That is an important issue in terms of competition between the north and the south.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important point. Currently, trust ports qualify for up to a maximum of 75 per cent. European regional development fund funding. In the private sector, that entitlement would be reduced to 50 per cent. It is an extremely important issue

when considering the benefits of privatisation. [AN HON MEMBER: "Which the Government will ignore."] I shall deal with that sedentary intervention, although I have been quite good at giving way to those hon. Members who have taken the trouble to stand up. We shall consider all the factors at the relevant time. As I have made clear, it is an extremely important consideration.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Is it not amazing that, because the EC has been prepared to give a larger grant to a company controlled by the Government, it is now prepared to give those larger grants to Government-controlled operations in the south? The south is moving towards Government-controlled companies just to get EC money, whereas our Government are moving away from that. In doing so, they will prevent money that we pay into Europe from being returned to us.

Surely, as a Conservative believing in private enterprise, the Minister should realise that the EC is actually opposing competition and the very philosophy in which he believes. Rather than doing what he proposes tonight, he should keep the ports as they are in order to get back our money from Europe.

Mr. Smith: I have some sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not see any rationale in distinguishing between businesses that happen to be publicly owned—and giving them a larger grant—and those that happen to be privately owned. I repeat the point that I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). He identified what is undoubtedly an extremely important consideration. Obviously, I believe that considerable benefits would accrue from privatisation. However, he raised an important factor that must be considered at the relevant time.

As in Great Britain, the underlying policy of the order is essentially one of voluntary privatisation, although it does provide the Department with compulsory powers to require ports with a turnover limit of £5 million index-linked to bring forward privatisation schemes if they have not done so within two years of enactment. As I am sure the House appreciates, at present the only relevant Northern Ireland port in that category is Belfast.

I can inform the House that I received more than 50 formal responses during the consultation process, none of which has necessitated any change to the order. Some concern was expressed about the possible impact of the privatisation of the port of Belfast. I must again emphasise that this order is purely enabling legislation and does not implement the privatisation of Belfast or, indeed, any other port in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am interested in the Minister's point about the order being enabling. Did not the hon. Gentleman say this morning that this was a privatisation Bill? Therefore, his remarks now about it being an enabling measure conflict with the point he made this morning. Will he now clarify the position?

Mr. Smith: If I remember rightly, what I said on television this morning was that this is a privatisation measure, which it clearly is because it facilitates the privatisation of the trust ports. It will enable privatisation to take place. Within the next two years it will be open to the Belfast harbour commissioners, if they so decide, to put forward a scheme for privatisation. Only after two years had elapsed would the Department consider the possibility of compulsory privatisation. That is the position. The measure does not give us the authority to compel the privatisation of the port of Belfast.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister giving way to so many interventions. He has compared this order with the 1991 legislation for Great Britain. How many ports have operated under that legislation? What steps have the Government taken to try to compel those who have not turned to privatisation to do so?

Mr. Smith: I am not sure of the exact position in Great Britain. I do not know whether the Department of Transport has required any particular privatisation scheme. I shall investigate and answer the point at the end of the debate. We may have reached the point where it would be open to the Department to do so, but I shall find out and provide the hon. Gentleman with that information. I think that the answer will be none.

As I explained, no such decision could be taken until two years after enactment of the order, and only then following consultation with both the port authority and interested parties, and detailed consideration of the implications of privatisation. If, after two years, and after consultation with the port authority, the Department decides not to use its compulsory powers, those powers will cease to be exercisable for a further period of five years.

I commend both the orders to the House.

7.36 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I do not think that I have ever heard such a short speech justifying such an arrant bank robbery of the people of Northern Ireland as the one we have just heard from the Minister. Because the order has remained below the line for such a long time, I had hoped that the Government would retreat from such a foolish and senseless course. Such a retreat would have been welcomed by all who are concerned with or work in the port. The Government have united opposition from those who work in Belfast harbour, from all the main political parties in Northern Ireland and from the vast majority of people living and working in Belfast and across the region.

Hon. Members have already pointed out the unsatisfactory way in which the measure is being introduced—as compared with what is happening in the remainder of the United Kingdom. Although the problems of an Assembly may be real, they should not take away from the Government the onus on them to introduce and justify their proposals. They should leave it to the Opposition to pray against the order. The Government should find a way of introducing their proposal in their own time.

The undemocratic nature of compulsory privatisation without debate, as exemplified by this procedure, is typical of the Government's cavalier attitude to this matter.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman has rightly criticised the undemocratic nature of the procedure that is being used. Will he therefore vote against the interim period extension order on Thursday? That would cure the problem because, if the provision were not extended, we should again have democratic procedures in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman tempts me too much. I should be delighted if the powers went to a devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland—when that is agreed among all the parties and both Governments with a strong internal settlement and even stronger cross-border institutions.

One of the senior executives of Belfast harbour commission described the procedures thus:

"Overall, one has to view privatisation as Tory dogma. If we assume that privatisation is not a good thing, the next thing you would bump into would be that the Government has a power compulsorily to privatise you."

If the harbour commissioners do not volunteer to commit suicide, they will be put down painlessly two years later.

At a time when the Government are rightly encouraging inward investment in Northern Ireland, there is a real possibility that one of Northern Ireland's indigenous profit-making organisations will be sold—possibly taken out of Ireland's control, and possibly even sold to a foreign purchaser, unless the Government say that they will prevent it.

Let me explain the broader significance of the port of Belfast to Northern Ireland's economy. Fifty-five per cent. of all imports and exports to and from Northern Ireland pass through the port of Belfast. The port thus provides not only employment and a degree of economic stability for the Greater Belfast area but a central focus for investment and employment throughout the region. Given the peripheral nature of Northern Ireland in relation to the United Kingdom, its ports provide a vital trade and tourism link between the island of Ireland and the rest of the European Community.

Northern Ireland, however, is in a unique position. Individual ports in the region not only compete with each other but face severe competition from ports in the Republic. It is against what is already a fiercely competitive background that the Government seek to privatise the port of Belfast—and, in doing so, have again decided to apply ideological dogma rigidly rather than following economic common sense.

The Government claim that the aim of the order is to improve effectiveness and efficiency, but they do not propose to privatise the most inefficient and ineffective ports in Northern Ireland; instead, they are forcing the sell-off of the most profitable of those ports, which has a turnover of at least £5 million. There could be no clearer illustration of the Government's real motives. They are not interested in the future of the region's dock industry, but they are eager to get their hands on substantial returns from the port of Belfast to cut the Treasury's deficit and put fat profits into the hands of their political and industrial friends.

That was brought out brilliantly by an intervention from the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), who asked what would happen to the other 50 per cent. It is a case of "Bid us a price, and we will give you half your money back": it is a Dutch auction. The money is going back to a company, and thence to private shareholders—money that has been raised by the harbour commissioners, and by the effort and integrity of a non-profit-making organisation to bring about the most efficient port in the north of Ireland. By "non-profit-making" I mean that it does not distribute its profits, but reinvests them in its own industry. All that money will be lost.

It would be ironic if, for example, one of Northern Ireland's main competitors in the Republic successfully took over the port of Belfast. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) drew attention to the position of ports in the Republic. Northern Ireland's ports have drawn considerably away from those in the republic, but in the event of privatisation and the consequential increase in charges, that traffic will almost certainly be lost back to ports in the south.

At present, about a third of traffic going through the port of Belfast comes from the Republic. Ports in the Republic receive full support from the European Community, and —as has been pointed out—as a result of the decision to give them semi-state body status, that aid looks set to continue. Because of the cohesion fund, it is likely to amount to up to 75 per cent., and may rise even further.

The Government are deliberately, specifically and directly forcing the port of Belfast to face increased competition from the Republic—from ports that will be increasingly subsidised to enable them to make their affairs more efficient and invest more in their own infrastructure. They propose to sell off a profitable, efficient port that is gaining traffic from all over Ireland: they are prepared to see that traffic lost.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As a respected democrat, is the hon. Gentleman not genuinely worried about the EC sabotaging the Conservative principle of privatisation by exercising such discrimination in regard to grants? I accept that, as always, his views are sincere; does he not think it ridiculous that the EC should have a policy that discriminates wholly against Conservative policy, and may prevent us from doing what we wish to do?

Mr. McNamara: I have no problems with discrimination against Conservative policy—and if I am not worried about it, I do not see why the Community should be. I am prepared to see more and more money going into public infrastructure: that is why I want to keep the port of Belfast in the public sector. It works efficiently and effectively as it is.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Gentleman says that, if the port is privatised, charges will immediately rise and a great deal of business will be lost to the Republic. How does he account for the success of the port of Larne, which is already privately owned?

Mr. McNamara: Regular fast catamarans carry people to and fro across a 16-mile strip of water, but the port of Larne cannot take the shipping that the port of Belfast can take.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): As the Member of Parliament representing the port of Larne, I assure the hon. Gentleman that as yet we have no catamarans running; but we have a very efficient ferry service. It is easier to get a boat to Scotland than to get a bus to some of the outlying villages. It is the regularity and reliability of a competitively priced service that makes the port of Larne attractive.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman forgot to mention that an effective road system is needed to increase the attraction still further. I was disappointed that he left that out.

The port of Belfast has enjoyed substantial financial assistance from the European regional development fund transport programme, which has enabled it to keep several steps ahead of its competition in the Republic. That,

however, will be lost. During the past five years, a combination of substantial European funding and investment from its own funds has produced a £100 million port fund in Belfast, which has significantly improved the port's infrastructure, and, consequently, its competitive edge. The facilities are new and modern; they are a testament to the sound management and astute business practice of the current Belfast harbour commissioners. However, the privatisation of the port—like the privatisation of Aldergrove airport—raises the question of the clawback of EC funds totalling approximately £60 million.

The Minister will recall that, at the time of the airports order, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) drew his attention to a letter from the European Commissioner, Bruce Millan. In effect, the letter stated that the question of clawback could arise in the event of the privatisation of the international airport. I must warn the Minister that the advice that we have received from the Commission about the privatisation of the port of Belfast is the same as that offered at the time of the Aldergrove sell-off. The EC may well decide to reclaim aid that was granted towards the development of the port's infrastructure in the ERDF programme; it may be especially encouraged to do that when told that half the purchase price is going back to the person who bought it.

Far from enhancing the port's effectiveness and competitiveness by privatising it, the Minister will prevent any further development of port infrastructure by means of EC funding. Meanwhile, the port's major competitors in the Republic will continue to enjoy all the benefits of European aid.

The order has a further worrying aspect, which is linked to infrastructure development and the ownership of the harbour estate. As a consequence of successful development across the estate, the port of Belfast now has a host of major and minor industrial tenants, including Shorts Bombadier, Harland and Wolff and many others. All the companies that located in the estate did so in the knowledge that the site had a good record for constantly developing and improving its infrastructure, and that the trust port arrangement ensured the existence of fair rents and leases. The Government's plans, however, leave the estate open to those who might seek to exploit the peripheral nature of the region.

The island of Ireland will be the only part of Europe that is wholly dependent on the use of ports for bulk import and export to and from the rest of the European Community. Consequently, if the new owners so wish, the estate can be left to run down on ever-increasing rents and leases. If short-term profit is the only motivating factor, why should the new owners make long-term costly investment in the infrastructure of the port? Thanks to the European taxpayer, the new private owners of the port of Belfast will be presented with a highly profitable concern.

What will consequently become of the development plans following the building of the new £10 million link road on the County Down side? That link is helping to develop an additional 200 acres of estate and should bring an additional 5,000 new jobs, increasing the total Belfast harbour estate work force to about 22,000. In an area where jobs are desperately needed, the gamble that the Government are taking with that future investment is clearly unacceptable.

The plans contained within the order jeopardise significant future investments in the harbour estate and with them the possibility of getting some of Northern Ireland's jobless back to work. There is less chance of a harbour rail link if we have to depend on private investment in order to achieve it rather than having public investment, possibly backed up by EC funds.

Let me deal now with ownership and accountability. The Minister will know that the regulations under which trust ports operate currently place the responsibility of care on the various statutory authorities that control the ports on behalf of and in the interest of the people serviced by the port. The regulations ensure that the harbour operates in the broadest interests of the wider community who benefit from long-term employment and investment prospects. The regulations further ensure that businesses are encouraged into the harbour industrial estate with fair charging and equal treatment in the allocation of berths and other port facilities. In short, the current regulations under which trust ports operate ensure that the long-term interests of the port and the estate prevail.

That formula has proved to be successful in the outstanding performance of the port of Belfast. Consequently, the Government should ensure that predatory ownership, particularly by companies in other member states, is not possible. Can the Minister tell the House whether the Government intend to retain a golden share in the port as they did with Belfast international airport? Would such a golden share be used to prevent investment by companies outside the United Kingdom?

Currently, all the profits made in the dock are reinvested in the estate. Money is raised in Ireland through the productivity of the people of Northern Ireland, and the profits are utilised for the benefit of the asset and the Northern Ireland economy. It is those very profits that are now to be used as an inducement to the potential purchaser. Those profits are all the incentive a predator needs to purchase the land bank. Thereafter, there is no incentive for any purchaser to improve on or invest in the infrastructure for the future. That is partly because the infrastructure is now very good and partly because purchasers can just sit there for 10 years, after which there is no levy and no clawback. Some of the richest land in Belfast, certainly some of that most ripe for development, will go to whoever purchases, at 50 per cent. of its face value, the new asset.

The people of Northern Ireland will have lost and the asset stripper will have gained a fast profitable return. Who might some of the predators be? Will it be the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, creating a monopoly in crossings to and from Liverpool? Will it be P and O, creating a monopoly with the port of Larne? Whoever else wishes to purchase the port of Belfast, will the Minister give an undertaking to the House today that the first option, if the Government go ahead with the sale, will be a management-employee buy-out and not a trade sale? Will he give an undertaking to the House that that will be the first thing that they will consider? That would at least ensure that a genuine commitment to the future of the port and to the Northern Ireland economy survived privatisation. That is very much a second best, however; things should be left as they are. As things stand now, there is a real danger of profit created in Northern Ireland being exported and creamed off; it could be just another example of absentee landlordism.

It seems that the success of the port of Belfast is not enough to curtail the Minister's zealous hunger for the notion of privatisation, even when the object of the Government's desire is operating competitively and

[Mr. McNamara]

efficiently. This debate, as with others on Northern Ireland Electric and Aldergrove airport, will expose the Government's privatisation plans in Northern Ireland for what they really are—plans to stuff the Treasury with money and to sell off assets to their friends.

The debate will show how belated, ill-judged and inappropriate attempts to keep pace with the discredited sell-off of assets throughout other parts of the United Kingdom during the 1980s are now being followed again in Northern Ireland. I very much regret the fact that Ministers feel that they must prove their ideological purity by indulging in this foolish measure.

Above all, we are seeing a trust established by the people of Belfast—the users of the port—pass out of the control of Northern Ireland. The trust has been developed by the people of Northern Ireland. It has developed an infrastructure and a going concern of considerable efficiency, but now the moneys generated by it are likely to be passed out of Northern Ireland. There is a real chance that charges will be increased and that the port will lose its competitive edge against the improved infrastructure within the Republic. Is that really what the Government think is sound economic sense? The Government are engaged in a foolish process. They are playing dangerously with the jobs and opportunities of people who work within the dock estate, and with the whole basis of Northern Ireland's economy.

7.55 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I cannot recall how long it has been since I followed a speech by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) with my blood pressure as settled as it is now. I am pleased that we shall be fighting in the same corner this evening.

On the face of it, the draft statutory instrument appears simply to place upon the port the ability, if it so wishes, to consider putting forward a proposal for privatisation. In reality, when the order becomes law it will pave the way for privatisation and will put Belfast port, to which the order essentially applies, on the slips to be sold off—some might say sold out.

Before I deal with the content of the order, I should like to raise two issues. The Minister referred to the consultation process. He told the House that he had received more than 50 responses. I very much regret the unhealthy arrogance that he showed by saying that the 50-plus responses did not require the slightest change in the measure. That is in effect what he told a number of hon. Members at the beginning of January when he said that he did not consider that any changes were required to the order.

Will the Minister tell us how many of the 54 responses that he received—I believe that that is the correct number—supported the Government's action? Does he consider those most directly involved in the port to be among the supporters of the measure? Do the harbour commissioners support him? Are they cheering him on? Does he have the support of all the trade unions in the port? Does he have the support of the shipping agencies in the port? Does he have the support of all the other users of the land site of the port? It is worth providing a breakdown of the 54 responses so that we know how many support the Minister and how many oppose the order.

The second issue is a procedural matter about which I spoke earlier. The Minister will recognise that when similar legislation was proposed for the mainland under the Ports Act 1991 the same provision applied to ports on the mainland. If within a two-year period they wished to put forward a proposal for privatisation to the Department, the measure could be dealt with directly on their suggestion. If they failed to make a proposal within two years, the Government could proceed to privatise the port, but in those circumstances the Government were required to table an affirmative resolution in the House. In the case of Northern Ireland, however, the Government will have to table not an affirmative resolution but a negative resolution. If the wisdom of the harbour commissioners is such that, after two years, they recognise that privatisation is not in the interests of Belfast and Northern Ireland, the Department can step in and determine that the port should be privatised. The House will have no opportunity to debate the matter.

I wrote to the Minister on the issue, and he replied:

"If . . . the Belfast Harbour Commissioners failed to come forward with a scheme within the first 2 years, the Government would at that stage have to decide whether it wished to invoke the reserve powers and enforce the privatisation of the Port. Of course, such a decision would only be taken after detailed consultations with the port authority and with all other interested parties".

We are aware of the Minister's approach to detailed consultation, so I shall avoid making any comment about that. He does not believe that such consultation requires his attention, but his response suggested that there would be consultation with all other interested parties. Surely Parliament is an interested party. Surely it has the right to debate such matters. It is not good enough for the Minister to say in his letter that

"in the event of a prayer against such an order the Government would consider any request to have the matter debated on the floor of the House."

I urge the Minister to go a little further and to give a firm undertaking that if a prayer is tabled he will ensure that the matter is considered by the House.

It is sleight of hand to refer to the order as enabling legislation. As it affects only Belfast port, the Minister will understand if I concentrate on the Belfast harbour commissioners. The Minister clearly intends to reduce the number of seats on the Belfast harbour commission and to retain the power to appoint future commissioners. If a commissioner does not toe the line and is not pro-privatisation, the Minister can turf him out and arrange for the right people to be appointed. The Government have decided to privatise Belfast port. Referring to the measure as enabling legislation is a con trick, a sleight of hand and an act of trickery to ensure that the order is passed.

I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North that this is not a trifling matter but a serious issue that is important to the Northern Ireland economy. Naturally, it most closely affects the Belfast constituencies and I trust that the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) will join us before the end of the debate and vote against the order, which will seriously affect his and my constituents and other hon. Members who represent Belfast.

The Northern Ireland economy will be affected by the proposal. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said, more than half of the imports and exports to and from Northern Ireland come through Belfast port. When the channel tunnel becomes operational, the

Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are the two parts of the European Community that will be isolated. Bulk imports and exports will be shipped to and from the main ports of Dublin and Belfast.

I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North that the draft order will result in poorer services and in dearer prices.

Mr. Tim Smith: Why?

Mr. Robinson: The Minister asks why. Less public finance—if one can call European Community funds public finance—will be allocated to Belfast port, so it will have to spend more money from its reserves. It will have to put up prices to meet the difference between what its competitors in Dublin receive in grants and what it receives. It will need more finance, and more finance through expenditure automatically requires higher prices.

Mr. Tim Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman not appreciate that the current charges have been set in a highly competitive market, as everyone who has spoken in the debate has agreed? There is healthy competition among the ports in the island of Ireland and, in the face of that, no port would increase its prices. Prices are set by the market.

Mr. Robinson: I hope that the Minister has now got it. He is making Belfast port uncompetitive and leaving it in a competitive market. It will not be able to compete because its main competitor, the port of Dublin, will grab all the EC funding at a much higher rate and will be much more competitive. Belfast port has the choice of putting up its prices or going out of business, so what will it do? It will put up its charges, to the detriment of the Northern Ireland economy. Belfast port is in a unique position. It already faces considerably more competition than ports on the mainland not only from other Northern Ireland ports but from Republic of Ireland ports.

The proposal is based on the Government's philosophy of privatisation. I do not take a doctrinaire view for or against privatisation. I was involved in pushing competitive tendering and privatisation before Thatcherism was popular, although it did not end up being very popular. Privatisation worked where I applied it because it was recognised that it would not work in all circumstances. It was necessary, therefore, to consider how it would work in commercial terms, in terms of jobs and in terms of the economy. When one applies those terms to the port, one finds that privatisation brings no advantage to Belfast port.

The Government have argued that privatisation takes the weight off the taxpayer meeting the costs of failing industries, but Belfast port is a success. It does not require handouts from the Government to meet its running costs or capital investment programme. The usual Tory line that propped-up, failing industries require the breath of privatisation does not apply to Belfast port. In the House of Lords, the Government spokesman said:

"The Government have consistently taken the view that the privatisation of the larger trust ports is an important element of the long-term strategy of opening up the ports industry to market forces."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 July 1991; Vol. 531, c. 348.]

The Northern Ireland trust ports, however, are already subject to market forces via competition either from Larne and elsewhere or from the Republic of Ireland. So that argument does not apply to the Northern Ireland ports.

It should be pointed out that the trade war—if such it may be called—between the ports of the Republic and those of Northern Ireland is being won by Northern Ireland. Between a quarter and one third of the imports and exports currently passing through Belfast port are for the Republic of Ireland, which shows that a significant slice of the Republic's trade passes in and out through Belfast.

Privatisation will not sharpen up a failing industry; the industry is already successful. I therefore ask: is it in the interests of the commerce of Northern Ireland that we lose the additional funding that would be available from Europe? Of course it is not. Is it in the interests of jobs? Everybody knows that the outcome of such privatisation processes is that jobs are lost, so there will be no advantage to Northern Ireland in the privatisation of its ports.

Only the Government's short-term interest is served by the order. It is a triumph of their ideology over the best interests of the community. The question must be asked, and answered: morally, if not legally, are the Government entitled to sell the Belfast port? I noticed that the explanatory document issued by the Department said:

"Trust ports are independent statutory authorities established under local legislation. They are not owned by anyone."

They may not be owned by anyone, but the Government will sell them anyway. That puts them in the position of receivers of stolen goods. Anywhere else that would be seen as a criminal act. The ports in Northern Ireland, such as Belfast port, are the property of the people of Belfast and of the people of Northern Ireland. They are not the property of a Tory Government to sell so that they can make the public sector borrowing requirement look a little better at the end of the year.

As I have already said, I am concerned that there will be a reduction not only in the grant, and therefore the investment, that will go into the Belfast port, but that it will become less competitive. A significant investment has been made in the past, and a considerable amount of European grant has been received. Over the past five years the port of Belfast has invested about £100 million in a ports development programme. Of that, £40 million came from its own funds and the remaining money from EC grants. That has helped the port to modernise its facilities, and it has added new facilities such as a roll on/roll off terminal. There are also new cranes, and the port has a vastly improved infrastructure.

We wonder whether, in the present circumstances, the EC could claw back the funds that it has already given to what was a public company. The House deserves a response from the Minister on that issue. Could European funds already granted be clawed back if the port becomes a private concern? The Minister says that the present available grant for the port is up to 75 per cent., but many people in the House will doubt whether a privatised port would get anything like the maximum of 50 per cent. of an EC grant. Indeed, some will consider it questionable whether it would get anything at all.

We must deal with the issue of the assets of the port as they currently stand. The bill may be, say, £50 million a year. The Minister has not offered us any better guidance on what he expects to net for his 50 per cent. of the income from the sale of the port. If he wanted to give us further guidance, it might be useful to the House. Can he give us a figure that he feels might be achieved by the sale of Belfast port?

Anyone who examines the assets connected with the considerable land site can see immediately that there are

[Mr. Robinson]

significant assets that could be sold off to pay for the purchase that the company will already have made. It seems a remarkable bargain. First, the purchasers have to pay only half the price; then they can probably sell about a quarter of the goods to pay for it, and end up with the rest for nothing. That is the bargain that the Minister is offering as an inducement to privatise the port.

As I understand it, the House should give considerable approval to the position of the harbour commissioners. They have effectively said that their interest is not personal, because commissioners might do very well out of a programme such as that offered under the order. But the commissioners recognise that the interests of the Northern Ireland economy as a whole would not be advantaged by the reduction of European funding.

The considerable land assets can be sold off, with a fairly meagre pay-back to the Government should that occur. So far as I can recall off the top of my head, about 25 per cent. is payable if pieces are sold within the first five years, stepping down to about 10 per cent. for years nine and 10. After 10 years the purchasers are on their own; they can sell anything, and do not have to pay back any of the money at all. That seems a remarkable sell-off of a public asset that should not be the private possession of any company.

A further issue is the virtual monopoly that will be created by such a sale. So far, at least, the Government have not publicly addressed that problem. At present, the harbour commissioners use a high degree of judgment to ensure equality of treatment and fair charging at the port. However, if the purchaser should happen to be someone with a private interest within the port, the charging might be varied to the advantage of that private interest. So fair charging and equality of treatment may be changed, depending on who the purchaser is.

Considerable concern has been expressed by the Belfast Shipping Agents Association, which is worried that privatisation would create a monopoly. The association says:

"Our members are concerned, for themselves and for the other providers of services in the Port of Belfast, for importers and exporters of goods and for Northern Ireland consumers generally, that in this monopoly situation any excessive increase in port charges made by a Privatised Port Authority could have serious and detrimental effects on the Northern Ireland economy."

The association asks:

"Will there be a safeguard, such as a Regulatory Authority, built in",

so that any new privatised port arrangement will be monitored? The Minister should answer that question.

There is another question concerning the assets to which I want the Minister to respond. The Minister seems to be shaking his head. Just because he made a two-minute speech, it does not mean that everyone else in the House has to do the same. I want to point the Minister in the direction of some important aspects of the possessions of the harbour commission.

I am thinking in particular of buildings with significant historical interest, and also paintings, sculptures and maritime artefacts which belong to the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland. Will the Minister make provision to ensure that those will form part of a maritime museum, rather than becoming the possessions of a new privatised company? The port of Belfast trade union side has argued that point strongly and I think that it is a strong case.

In conclusion, it can be seen that Belfast port is substantially different from other ports in the United Kingdom, especially in view of the competition from ports in the Republic of Ireland. Privatisation would do considerable damage to the whole of the Northern Ireland economy. The Government should be repudiated for their attempt to benefit their own financial interests rather than the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. I urge the Government to take the sale off the counter. Indeed, I argue that the port is not theirs to sell. We are told that the Government's policy is to attempt to get Northern Ireland parties to agree. Here the Northern Ireland parties are in agreement about what we want, so what do the Government do? They form the obstacle to having those wishes fulfilled.

8.20 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I support the remarks made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). The Government know that the overwhelming response from the general public, community organisations, the trade unions, Belfast city council and the political parties was direct opposition to the proposals. What confidence can we have that the interests of Northern Ireland will be taken into account during any future consultation process? That question is especially pertinent given that we have not yet had a response to the points raised in the submission.

The Government say that they have no economic or selfish interests in Northern Ireland. That statement rings hollow when we see the way in which they are systematically stripping Northern Ireland of its assets, leaving the Province weak, vulnerable and open to exploitation by monetary interests whose sole purpose is to prey on our people's work ethic and thereby amass vast personal wealth.

The port of Belfast, as our principal sea port, is the latest to suffer from this macabre and irresponsible attitude. Belfast is not in competition with any British port. Its main competition comes from the southern Irish ports and, at present, it compares very favourably with them. As a result of the order, that competitiveness will be lost.

As has already been said, the Dublin Government have already decided that their ports will remain in public hands, thereby maintaining their eligibility, as public concerns, for up to 85 per cent. European grant money, whereas private businesses are eligible for only 50 per cent. That is not a calm fishing reach and it tips the equation the wrong way, at our expense. I am also informed that the Dublin Government extend favourable tax treatment to their ports and that new harbour legislation is under way further to extend those advantages.

We all know that the port of Belfast has benefited substantially from the European regional development fund to help it restructure and modernise in a down-river relocation. I am, therefore, concerned about the precise changes in ERDF status that the privatisation process may bring about. It is conceivable that the European Community could, rightly, demand a return of a proportion of the grants if it believed that, under privatisation, the general public might not have the benefits and uses that they enjoy under the present status.

I am apprehensive about the effects that privatisation would have on the site of special scientific interest, which is essential to the welfare of many forms of wildlife that are

fowl in the location. It is widely recognised that the area is vital in the migratory pattern of water fowl. Although the private sector may not exploit an SSSI, it is most unlikely to invest in it and manage it to the same degree.

I am also concerned about safeguards against predatory ownership, especially by companies based in member states. Do the Government intend to follow the example of the sale of Belfast international airport and retain a golden share in the ports? Will there be a change of ownership structure? If there is, it will be essential that any purchaser can demonstrate a long-term commitment to the continuing success of the port so that customers and employees can be confident of a stable future under the new regime.

8.24 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I bring to this debate the experience of having represented, for the past 10 years, the port of Immingham. I recall that in my first Session of Parliament I had the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee that considered the Transport Bill which brought into being Associated British Ports, the private company that runs many of the ports in the United Kingdom, including the port in Hull and the one in my constituency.

I reassure Ulster Members that my intervention in the debate will be brief. I intend to make two main points about the orders, which I very much welcome. If any Ulster Member has any concerns about the benefits that privatisation may or may not bring, I invite him to come to Immingham in my constituency.

Opposition Members who served on the Transport Bill Committee threatened that all the ports on the east coast of England would close. They said that Immingham and Grimsby would go into a decline and that Hull would go into even more of a decline. Now we have Associated British Ports, which is not answerable to the old British Transport Docks Board and the Treasury. There is competition not only among the ports within the group but with other ports.

Felixstowe used to be difficult to compete against. The arguments put by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) today were put when Associated British Ports was set up. People said, "How will it be possible for the newly privatised ports of Immingham, Grimsby and Hull to compete against Rotterdam and Felixstowe?" Rotterdam had European money pouring into the Europort. People asked how it would be possible for the little ports out in the cold in the private sector, which had no access to capital and no access to the Treasury, to compete. The truth is that they compete on their own terms with Rotterdam and Felixstowe. I am sure that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) would testify to that. The blunt truth is that there is a renaissance in the docks industry on the east coast as a result of privatisation.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is right about the renaissance of docks on the east coast of Britain. That may not be due solely to competition, although I concede that competition is important. What does he say to the point made by Unionist Members here this evening—that under the new arrangements, Belfast will be handicapped in competition with Dublin? That is the essential point. We are not opposed to competition. We appreciate that competition has been successful in other areas and we know that our ports can compete successfully. However, the orders will handicap our ports in competition with their only and chief competitor. Will the hon. Gentleman address that issue?

Mr. Brown: I simply say that that is exactly the argument—I recall it well—used by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who also served on the Standing Committee in 1980-81. He made precisely that point about the relationship between Immingham, Grimsby, Hull and Rotterdam.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I have promised to be brief because I know that, as an intruder from England in a Northern Ireland debate, I must not take up too much time. However, I shall give way.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with that. The fact is that the Belfast port and the Dublin port are on the same island. Therefore, they are in competition with each other. Rotterdam is not on the mainland of the United Kingdom. It is not in competition. Those ports are in competition with each other, not with Rotterdam.

Mr. Brown: I am afraid that that is simply not true. It is the case that the success of Immingham docks in securing for itself trade that once upon a time used to come from all the world, including South Africa and South America, and go to Rotterdam, which served Europe, now comes to Immingham and to Hull. I have to tell the hon. Gentlemen that it is precisely because of privatisation in the early 1980s that we succeeded in bringing to the east coast of Britain, rather than to the mainland of Europe, much of the international docks traffic that is now available to the United Kingdom. I say to hon. Members from Northern Ireland that docks traffic is international. It does not know boundaries in the way that they have suggested.

I now want to get on to the main—

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way any more after this. I am anxious to press on to the main point of my speech.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I put to the hon. Gentleman the following case. Dublin is to receive money from the European Community. Remember, the south of Ireland is getting £6 million, when Northern Ireland has got nothing out of the European Community, and instead is paying up per head of its people—I have received those answers from the Treasury. If Dublin is to receive a £6 million kitty to build up the port and the new ports scheme, being a private scheme, is not to have the 85 per cent. grant—perhaps not even a 50 per cent. or a 30 per cent. grant—surely that would be unfair competition. The hon. Gentleman is talking about England in fair competition with others. I am talking of a situation that would be totally unfair.

Mr. Brown: I understand entirely the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. It is rather like the unfairness which Immingham, Grimsby and Hull had to put up with after they were privatised, to the extent that they were also handicapped by a thing on the mainland of the United Kingdom called the dock labour scheme. We had unfair practices, we had handicaps, we had unfairness against Felixstowe. Indeed, it was not until 1989 that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)

[Mr. Brown]

finally abolished the scheme, after much pressure and lobbying from my hon. Friends, and we were able to get rid of an unfair handicap. So I understand entirely what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. He is talking of a relative unfairness on the island of Ireland. We also had a relative unfairness, yet never for one moment did I suggest that we should not go down the road of privatisation simply on the grounds of that unfair handicap.

Two years ago, the Government took a further step towards liberalising the ports industry by enabling trust ports to become privatised. To date, that process has proved a success and it is to be hoped that the remaining trust ports will follow the example of their colleagues. Of course, all of those ports have followed in the wake of the outstanding privatisation of ABP in 1983, which I have just described. I very much hope that the Belfast harbour commissioners and the trustees of other ports in Northern Ireland will give serious consideration to the advantages which privatisation may offer them.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will not give way. I have been generous in giving way and I am acutely aware that we have less than two hours left. I hope that the remarks which I am about to make may find favour with the hon. Member for Belfast, East and a number of his hon. Friends. On the following point, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not to reconsider, but to listen carefully to the points on the constitutional aspects of the order.

I have had the privilege of serving as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for one year. I was secretary of the Conservative parliamentary Northern Ireland committee for over six years, vice-chairman of that committee for two years and for one year the Government Whip with responsibility for Northern Ireland. I have always been acutely conscious of the arguments consistently advanced by hon. Members from all political parties in Northern Ireland about the manner in which our debates are conducted. On that, I agree that there may well be some merit in what they have to say.

My second point concerns the constitutional position on Northern Ireland ports should the Government, at some stage, decide to exercise their compulsory powers. I have no argument at all against the Government using those powers if they decide to do so. While I am absolutely in favour of the concept of privatisation and, perhaps one day, compulsory privatisation, it is a fact that, that under the terms of the order, Northern Ireland ports are put at a constitutional disadvantage. As the hon. Member for Belfast, East has already said, the statutory instrument would pass through Parliament under the negative resolution procedure, with no opportunity for parliamentary debate, whereas, for mainland British ports that are compelled to privatise—Aberdeen, Ipswich and Poole may fall into that category—a debate on the Floor of the House is automatically guaranteed.

I do not wish to be disrespectful to the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, but it is only right and proper for Northern Ireland ports to be treated in exactly the same way as their mainland counterparts. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has received a number of representations on that issue and has already given some assurances about considering permitting a full debate. There is some merit in what hon. Members have said about getting the procedures for Northern Ireland on exactly the same basis as we have for the rest of the United Kingdom.

I hope that if hon. Members from Northern Ireland are not able accept my views and arguments in favour of privatisation, they will at least understand that I accept the case that they have put on the constitutional manner in which this order and consequent orders should be put to the House.

8.36 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I am grateful for an opportunity to make a few brief remarks on the orders, which I want to oppose on the same grounds as those on which my party opposed the Ports Act 1991. We have heard from the Minister that the order is an enabling measure. Were that so, we would have no difficulty with it, because the enabling characteristics of it are not ones with which we would wish to take issue, but lurking behind the enabling characteristics is the threat of coercion. That is where we would part company with the Government.

There has been mention of the need for competition between ports and we very much support that. We recognise that, in the past, some trust ports may have viewed the private Bill procedure in the House as so complicated that they would get bogged down in it, so we have no problem with the principle of freeing up that procedure. However, if some port trustees—the Belfast harbour commissioners or whoever—see that process simplified and serve out the two-year time period, which is already contained in the mainland legislation and is envisaged in the orders, and then decide not to proceed voluntarily with privatisation, there seems little justification for the Government stepping in over their heads and trying to do it on a compulsory basis.

The Government do not seem to have listened to, or learnt from, their earlier legislation. Few, if any, of the candidates on the mainland involved in that earlier legislation who have failed to come up with proposals in the two-year period want, at this stage, to change their status. That is why we shall again oppose the Government over the orders. We believe now, as before, that the Government should not ride over the heads of the commissioners who deal on a day-to-day basis with those matters and who have arrived at a considered decision that takes into account local factors. Different ports have different characteristics. In the case of Northern Ireland —as hon. Members have already said, Belfast is the only port which is threatened because it is the only port which falls into the criteria—the economic difficulties that it faces simply cannot be overlooked. One must ask whether the area would be better off as a result of compulsory privatisation of the Belfast port. Many hon. Members who have already spoken in the debate have persuasively put forward the argument that it would not.

The Government believe that privatisation is an attractive option because it will give access to capital for development, it will in some way make it easier to develop surplus land and there will be more diversification of development. They have even suggested that it will become more profitable. Some of those arguments may be true, but will they all be true?

The record of Belfast port shows that it has already enjoyed success by reinvesting the surpluses that it has made by raising money on its own account. It has shown resourcefulness and imagination. It has an impressive growth rate—an increase of more than 40 per cent. in the past five years. There has been modernisation, and much land has already been leased to relevant commercial interests. Belfast port is a vital and integral part of the Northern Ireland economy.

Reference has been made to the disadvantage in the European grant regime that would follow any privatisation. What the hon. Members for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) said earlier about competitiveness is right. The argument that Belfast would be at a sharp disadvantage, especially in terms of competing with Dublin, if it were on a completely different grant regime has not been satisfactorily answered by the Government.

Another point is accountability. The Belfast harbour commissioners draw on representation from various elements of the community in Northern Ireland. In the event of a compulsory sell-off, they would be replaced by an unaccountable—in any public sense—private body. That body could conceivably have directors who know little of the interests of Northern Ireland and, indeed, the port itself. Many of them may be anonymous and have little interest in it.

I hope that the Minister will give an unambiguous answer to the question put by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). Would the Government use any golden share that they might retain to block a foreign interest coming in and taking over? Would the community be better off as a result of a private sale? Would a company whose sole motive was to make a profit serve the community better than the current Belfast harbour commissioners? Surely, employment is the most important thing to the community at large. The Minister has suggested that the economic opportunities arising from privatisation will assist in that regard, but I believe that we should be concerned about the threats that have been identified by hon. Members in this debate.

Finally, on the constitutional point, it seems wrong that the procedures for Northern Ireland should be different from those for the rest of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said that the Minister referred to "considering" any request to have the matter debated on the Floor of the House. In a letter to Lord Holme, who speaks for us on these matters in another place, he went one step further and said that the Government would give "careful consideration" to any such request. That is not good enough. We must have an unequivocal commitment from the Government that any such move will be debated on the Floor of the House as a matter of course.

The bulk of the United Kingdom's trade still uses ports. The role of the ports in our economy is crucial. It is okay to set up enabling measures so that those who wish to privatise can take advantage of that. However, there can be no excuse whatever for forcing, over the heads of the commissioners, ports to privatise when they do not wish to do so, especially in the light of the unfair competition, in terms of European grant, that would result from privatisation.

8.43 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): While I, as the spokesman for my party on this subject, will be raising a number of concerns relating to these orders, it would be useful for me to give the House a little history lesson to highlight the changes that have taken place in electing or appointing harbour commissioners since the Origins of Port 1613.

In 1785, the corporation for preserving and improving the port and harbour of Belfast was set up by an Act of Parliament. That body was later to become known as the ballast board. The success of that board in expanding the ports operations led, in 1847, to a successor board—the Belfast harbour commissioners—being given authority and trust status further to develop the harbour under the Harbour, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847. The new board set about creating three main channels for ships and earned Belfast the name of the trident port.

The Belfast Harbour Commissioners Board still runs the port and its nine members are appointed by the Minister. That came about because the Belfast Harbour Acts Amendment (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 was passed by the House, giving the power of appointment to the Department of Commerce—a power which subsequently passed to the Department of Environment and the Minister.

Under the 1847 Act, one third of the commissioners stood down every year and an election was held to replace or re-elect them. That election was held on the first Thursday in February under the control of the secretary of the Belfast harbour commissioners. It is interesting to know that the candidates and electors had to reside in Belfast or within seven miles of it. That was measured from the town's commercial buildings. For at least six months prior to the election, they had to own a vessel of more than 100 tonnes registered in the port of Belfast, and they had to own property with an annual value of £500, or £300 if it was a holding or a freehold estate. They were also required to pay a police tax of £6 to Belfast town council.

Basically, we can assume that the commercial interests associated with the harbour elected those running the harbour—the Belfast harbour commissioners. Perhaps, these days, the narrowness of that electorate could be criticised but it was wider than the appointments made and the orders raised by one person—the Minister—who is unelected by anyone in Belfast harbour, Belfast city or even Northern Ireland. If we place on top of that the proposal under article 12 to introduce privatisation by negative resolution, we can truly say that democracy in Northern Ireland does not exist.

My views on quangos are well known. As it is presently appointed, the Belfast Harbour Commissioners Board is a quango.

Rev. Martin Smyth: My hon. Friend is referring to quangos and how they are appointed. Is he prepared to acknowledge that, according to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, there must be consultation with the Maryfield secretariat?

Mr. Forsythe: I understand that that is the case. Consultations can take place between the two Governments on the matter. The quango is similar to 150 other bodies in Northern Ireland. My friends among the

[Mr. Forsythe]

Belfast harbour commissioners will not like me saying that. I object to the creation of that quango and will continue to object to it until we achieve some change.

I am fully aware of the excellent work carried out by the present board and other boards through the years. Their work has been on a par with that of commissioners in the past, who were elected under a different system. I am also aware of what the port means and of the high regard in which the commissioners are held by the citizens of Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland.

Leaving aside my views about the intentions of the order, I must put on record clearly, as other hon. Members have done, my strong objections to the method that is being used to pave the way to the removal of the port of Belfast from local control. It completely ignores the original intention of the Acts of Parliament, which were properly debated and amended or accepted by this mother of Parliaments. It represents a tremendous change for Belfast harbour in terms of democracy and so on.

Perhaps we should consider, for the benefit of those who do not have a Belfast background, what will be lost to local people if the control of the port is taken outside Northern Ireland under article 12 of the order. There is a 3,000 acre estate with 8,000 m of quayage. There are 70 berths, which include four roll on/roll off docks, six container docks, four dry docks and one shipbuilding dock. There are 58,000 sq m of transit storage sheds, and four grain silos which hold about 150,000 tonnes of grain.

As has already been mentioned, within that estate we have Shorts Bombardier, Harland and Wolff, the city airport and many other smaller firms, including Belfast West power station. I shall ask the Minister some questions at a later stage. Perhaps he will explain about the cross-harbour road and railway line which is being constructed. What will be the position of the road and rail network under the new arrangements for privatisation, if, indeed, privatisation takes place? I understand what the Minister said earlier about the order being a paving operation, but let us be honest: a paving operation is there to be used.

As others have said, the port accounts for 55 per cent. of all Northern Ireland's imports and exports. It has public user facilities for fuel oil, petroleum products, petroleum gas and aviation fuel. It has heavy lifting and general cranage. It has deep berths. All of those facilities are unavailable, at least to the same extent, in the rest of Northern Ireland.

As other hon. Members have said, the harbour commissioners' building contains many items of historical significance, many of which were gifts. The building is part of the history and culture of Northern Ireland. It is used for receptions. It plays a civic role. It hosts concerts and tours. As my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) said, many experts regard the estate as an area of scientific interest and are greatly worried about how they would deal with a commercial firm which had a profit motive.

Why is the successful port of Belfast being upset by a plan for privatisation? Belfast city council opposes it. The trade unions oppose it. Politicians have spoken against it. The people of Northern Ireland do not wish privatisation to happen. They would like the port to remain under local control. Perhaps the Minister will say that the port could remain under local control if a proposal were made. But that cannot be guaranteed if the port is privatised. Unfortunately, I have to consider what the Minister seems to have ignored—the views of most of those who responded to the consultation process. Unfortunately, it seems to me that the port is being privatised for ideological reasons and because it is the policy of the Conservative party.

I shall now ask the Minister some questions, having given a history lesson. The Minister may already have been aware of the history, but I thought that it was worth putting it on the record. What precisely will be the position of the Belfast harbour police? I know that one of my Labour colleagues will probably raise a similar point if he manages to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker. No mention has been made of that force. The same applied to the airport privatisation order.

We all have great admiration for the fine Belfast harbour police force. It has given stalwart service to the harbour over many years. It has done so in Northern Ireland and Belfast terms in the most difficult circumstances. It is important that the Minister should put on record the exact position on future policing of this substantial area within the city of Belfast.

There are several questions which the Minister was probably aware that I might ask. I do not wish to take up a lot of time. If the port is privatised, will he produce ideas and proposals for the Belfast harbour police before the privatisation plan is fully implemented?

It has been said by others, and is worth repeating, that the privatisation of the port would lose Belfast its trust status. Under the present status, the harbour commissioners enjoy a healthy level of profitability and they pay full corporation tax, which is very useful to the Exchequer. They receive no assistance from the Government for port development expenditure, and their ability to keep profits has allowed port development to be carried out with the assistance only of grants from the European regional development fund. That has resulted in the harbour benefiting substantially from those funds.

Will the Minister put on record what changes he sees taking place in the European grant regime? Could he share with us the impact of such changes? For instance, when Belfast port is privatised, would there be any requirement —as others have asked—for the Government to reimburse the grants received in the past by the Belfast harbour commissioners?

In that context, does not the Minister think that it is ironic—I am sorry that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) is no longer here, as I would have liked him to have heard this—that the Government are laying an order to pave the way for the privatisation of Belfast harbour at a time when the cohesion fund status and aid through Intereg 2 is being applied to ports in the Republic of Ireland? Those ports are being offered grants of up to 85 per cent. because the Government of the Republic are reinforcing the trust status of the ports.

I need not repeat, but I reinforce, what been said about Belfast being treated differently under the order from ports in the rest of the United Kingdom with regard to article 10 of the Ports Act 1991. Will the Minister put on record how he intends to protect the port users, because a monopoly would be created if it were privatised? The port has public user facilities which other ports in Northern Ireland do not have. The only facilities for such products as aviation fuel, petroleum and low-pressure gas are in Belfast port and are

not available anywhere else. A monopoly in Belfast port could be crucial to the charges of those products and to Northern Ireland.

Will the Minister consider setting up a regulatory authority to monitor port changes and to prevent excessive profits? I agree with what has been said about the risk to firms of long standing which have given great service to the port—such as stevedores and ship's agents—and they in no circumstances should be squeezed out by a monopoly. That would be very unfortunate.

Will the Minister tell the House, if we get to the stage where the port is privatised, what will be the position of the port's pension fund? Perhaps he could tell us the position of the pension fund now, but he cannot tell us what it will be like in two years' time, because he is not a prophet. I am interested in this matter, because there will be a lot to think about if the fund is either in surplus or in deficit. In the past we have had to ask the Minister to put on record his views on the pensions position of the workers and the staff of the port.

If the port is privatised, will the Minister give me a proper undertaking—not a superficial undertaking—about the position of the members employed in the port, the pensioners who are already receiving their pensions and deferred pensioners who no longer work in the port, or are working there but are deferred pensioners? Will a condition of sale for any new owner be to continue the fund in its present form to ensure that all members, pensioners and deferred pensioners do not lose out in the future?

The Minister will be aware that a new company could take over a facility such as the port of Belfast and close the pension fund. Will he assure me that, if the port is privatised, the position for members of the pension scheme would not change because they would receive any amount due to them up to a given time? Would that pension fund be allowed to continue under the same conditions and providing the same benefits, and would that be written into any contract or arrangement between the Government and a new company, if the port is privatised? In that context, will the Minister assure us that all the recommendations contained in the document on the future of pensions presented to the House last week will be closely followed in any negotiations concerning the pension fund?

The democracy that now exists in the election of Belfast harbour commissioners will disappear and a Minister will appoint the commissioners. Instead of being allowed to debate future privatisation matters in the House, the matter will be introduced by negative resolution. For those reasons and because the port is so important to Belfast, we are not happy with the prospect of it being privatised. My hon. Friends and I have no ideological views one way or the other on privatisation except on the merits of the case. The merits of this case do not take us into the same Lobby as Her Majesty's Government and we shall vote against the order.

9.6 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am here tonight and have an interest in opposing the order not merely because I am a Labour Member of Parliament—although that is a good enough reason for being here—but because my constituents are angry about how badly my community in Tilbury was treated over the sale of its port and are concerned that similar circumstances should not befall the people of Belfast, who are also proud of their port.

It is worth trying to remind Tory Members that they are hearing me in the Chamber tonight partly because my predecessor, who lost the election, was a passionate advocate of the privatision of the port of Tilbury.

Mr. Tim Smith: A great man.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister says that my predecessor is a great man, but the good people of Thurrock did not think so. While I hope that I brought other qualities to the campaign, the fact remains that I am here partly because the people of Thurrock deeply resented the sale of their port, of which they were proud, and the fact that their Member of Parliament advocated that sale. Arguably, that is what cost Mr. Tim Janman the election and provided an extra seat for the Labour party.

Those facts give me a mandate not only to raise that matter but to say that I am proud to associate myself with the views expressed by Northern Ireland Members who on their constituents' behalf, strongly oppose Belfast's privatisation. The Government should reflect on this before making any attempt to trigger the sale of the port of Belfast: they have no mandate whatever for such a sale. The political parties in Northern Ireland demonstrably oppose such privatisation. The trade unions definitely oppose it, not only for employment reasons—although they are rightly worried about employment—but because the people of Belfast are proud of their history and of the harbour, which, to them, is a symbol of that history. That should not be minimised or dismissed: it is an important factor that the Government should take into account in considering the matter further.

I share the view of other hon. Members that this is a crazy and unacceptable way in which to treat Northern Ireland legislation. I do not care what happens or what is said elsewhere: as a Member of the House of Commons, I want the capacity and opportunity to scrutinise and probe the intentions of the Government and to examine all legislation in detail.

This order is equivalent to a major Act of Parliament, and in any normal and sensible circumstances would justify the full scrutiny of a parliamentary Committee. Why? Because we should be able to examine the Government's intentions. In the course of that legislative process, the Government would, almost as surely as night turns into day, discover that their measure was in some respects flawed. Even if they could not be persuaded by hon. Members that the provisions should be tempered, they would find that the draftsmen and their offices had overlooked some important factors. This legislative process and this order in particular are therefore bad from the point of view of scrutiny of our law-making process.

If we had had the opportunity to consider the legislation in Committee, many of the questions that have been posed by hon. Members tonight would have been answered. I suspect that many of those questions will not be answered when the Minister replies, but we shall see. Perhaps he will be understanding when some of us ask him to give way later: it would be reprehensible if he tried to plead shortage of time or to claim that he had not fully taken note of the point. He has a moral obligation to answer our questions tonight because the matter may well not come before the House of Commons again, in which case there will be no further scrutiny.

As the Minister would expect, and as the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) rightly said, let us use the

[Mr. Mackinlay]

future of the police at Belfast harbour as an example of a matter that we wish to probe. This important point would not only have a debate to itself: if we considered the legislation in Committee, it would probably be the subject of new clauses and amendments.

It is important that people who hold the office of constable should be protected from commercial considerations, which might well trespass on their work if the port were privatised. We do not know who the prospective purchasers might be. Some very undesirable outfits might purchase the port. For those purchasers to have access to and stewardship and ownership of a police force seems to me to be unacceptable.

In any event, I must declare that it is repugnant to me, as a matter of policy, that any police force should be in private ownership and control. I have said that many times. I may sound like a long-playing gramophone record but I say it once more. The Government are privatising police forces in Northern Ireland and in the port of Tilbury in my constituency. It is the thin end of the wedge. It is unacceptable. It is unfair to police officers, who are proud of their office, and it is unacceptable to other police forces that remain in the public sector.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Minister owes not only him but the people of Northern Ireland an explanation as to why he intends to proceed by means of an Order in Council rather than by means of a Bill, which would allow the hon. Gentleman and right hon. and hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies the right to speak on the subject and amend the proposed legislation? The Minister owes the House an explanation as to why he has selected a procedure that gives the people of Northern Ireland, through their elected Members of Parliament and through friends such as the hon. Gentleman, no opportunity to amend the legislation.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. We shall see whether the Minister takes up that point when he replies.

I share a common interest with those who are protecting and promoting the interests of Belfast harbour and its people tonight. Unlike the rest of the trust ports that were subject to the Ports Act 1991, my port of Tilbury was privatised without further scrutiny being given to the proposals in the House. The matter was subject to examination during the Committee stage of the Ports Bill, so it received more scrutiny than the possible privatisation of Belfast port. Once the Ports Bill was enacted, the port of Tilbury was treated extraordinarily and as distinct from the other trust ports. It was sold without any further reference, order or debate in this place. That is what will happen to the port of Belfast unless the Government can be persuaded to turn from their present course; there will be no further discussions in this place. We shall read in the financial pages one day that the port of Belfast has been disposed of. That is unacceptable and discriminates against Northern Ireland.

While provision exists for the compulsory sale of Aberdeen, Poole or Ipswich to be examined and voted on in the House, Belfast will not have that privilege. That is unacceptable. Let us ask the Minister for the true reason behind it. Is it not a fact that the Government know that there will be considerable resistance if they try to push through an order relating to Aberdeen, Poole or Ipswich because they will have to allow the order to be scrutinised? By a quirk, they can push through the order relating to Belfast without further scrutiny, which suits their purposes because they need to try to start promoting legislation and getting greenbacks for the Treasury—the order is, to a large extent, Treasury driven.

If we had a proper legislative process, we could pursue the reasonable point made by many hon. Members about the buildings and artefacts of the harbour commissioners. When we were debating the Railways Bill, we had discussions about the artefacts of the railways, and how they would be preserved, kept in public ownership and made available to the public. I attended the sittings of the Committee that considered the Ports Bill, although unfortunately I was not then a Member of the House, and there was then a general debate about the artefacts of the railways after privatisation.

The harbour commissioners at Belfast have great artefacts and antiquities of which they are proud and which, it is felt, belong to the people of Belfast. I recall an enjoyable and interesting day when the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) took me to visit the harbour commissioners. I saw their buildings and learnt about the history mentioned by the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe). I am grateful that he related that history to the House as it should be placed on record. That history is inextricably bound up with the pride that the people of Belfast have in their harbour and the historic nature of the commissioners' office.

At some stage during our deliberations, the Minister tried to taunt the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) by implying that, unless the order was passed, the port of Larne would be disadvantaged. The hon. Member for Antrim, East, whose constituency includes the port of Larne, will no doubt speak on his own behalf. However, let me say that, while there is competition between Larne and Belfast, they also complement one another. There is a balance—one is in public ownership and one is in private ownership, and long may that situation flourish. But if the port of Belfast is disposed of, it will raise the question of whether there will still be two ports. The future would then be uncertain, which would obviously be damaging to employment and the communities that are largely served by the two ports. Far from these orders being an attractive proposition for Larne, their prospect raises great dangers. I look forward with interest to what the hon. Member for Antrim, East has to say.

Mr. John D. Taylor: There are more than two ports in Northern Ireland; we also have Londonderry and Warren Point. The Government are giving their full support and enthusiasm to expenditure, through the cohesion fund of the European Community, to advance the ports in the Republic of Ireland, and that will eventually lead to the closure of Warren Point harbour.

Mr. Mackinlay: The point made by the right hon. Gentleman is manifestly an important one. When I visited Warren Point, I saw for myself that the Republic opposite would benefit from the cohesion fund—and that is its entitlement—whereas Warren Point would not.

After all the bravado and macho politics displayed by the Prime Minister in his approach to Europe—and I shall not trespass too far down that road this evening—it

occurred to me to ask why, some months ago, the Government did not argue that the cohesion fund should extend to the whole of the island of Ireland. That would have been logical and would not have trespassed on other sensitive issues involving Northern Ireland and the Republic, but—so far as I am aware—it never crossed their mind.

The matter arose in European Standing Committee B and I tried to probe the Minister about it. Clearly, it had never occurred to him to go to Brussels and bang on the table and explain the extraordinary circumstances involving the interface between Northern Ireland and the Republic and that there is a strong case for the cohesion fund to extend to the island of Ireland. All the parties concerned would have understood that, but the Government did not even contemplate exploring the issue. That is absolutely wretched and jeopardises the port and interests at Warren Point and probably elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) gave us the benefit of his attention earlier. I regret that he is not here now as I thought he was talking through a hole in his hat when he suggested that there was a comparable situation as between Rotterdam and Cleethorpes. Has anyone heard anything so absurd? Certainly not today. If the port of Belfast loses grant from the European Community because it is sold off and if the port of Dublin and the Irish Government legitimately seek to exploit the cohesion fund there will demonstrably be disadvantages to the port of Belfast; for the hon. Gentleman to suggest otherwise is nonsense.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes told us what a great advantage privatisation was and how the Ports Act 1991 was so attractive. It is significant that, so far as I am aware, none of the trust ports that were subject to the 1991 Act have voluntary put up their hands and asked to be privatised. We are still waiting with bated breath to find out whether the Government will move in relation to Ipswich, Aberdeen or Poole. I hope that they will not. It is interesting to note that the equivalent of the harbour commissioners there have not volunteered their ports for privatisation, despite the attraction that we are told exists.

The Government cannot get their way there, so they decide to pick on a part of the country, a particular port, where there is not so much political clout or opposition as would occur were they to tackle Aberdeen with the political considerations there, Poole, which is a Tory area, or Ipswich, which is a marginal parliamentary seat.

I am also concerned about the implications for the dock workers. One of the experiences in the port of Tilbury is that people who were proud to be employed in the docks industry are now facing casualisation. There have been major redundancies and people are not employed on a full-time basis with the pay and conditions of service to which they are entitled.

On the other side of the Thames, it is important that people in Belfast are aware of what has happened to the port of Medway, where a tantalising carrot was put before the dock workers in the form of an invitation to join what I believe to be a wholly bogus and cosmetic management-employee buy-out. It was suggested that they could have a share in their enterprises. We have heard that commercial before—how it was all part of the Thatcher revolution; people could have a stake in their firms.

The good dock workers of Medway were invited to take shares in their port. Many did so. Not long after that port was sold to a so-called management-employee buy-out dock worker after dock worker was sacked. They then found that, under the small print, they were obligated to sell back their shares at £2.50 per share. Some of the purchasers of their shares were the port owners/managers. They got hold of those cheap shares and after a few months sold them again at a price of £37.50 per share. That was a rip-off. In my view, it was a form of stealing. It was a gross deceit perpetrated upon the workers.

I suppose that this measure had a Committee stage. If, on reflection, the Government felt that what happened at Medway was unfair, they could amend the order to ensure that even if someone lost his job he could hold on to his shares. *[Interruption.]* If I could just attract the Minister's attention for a moment, I should like to ask him a specific question. Will he ensure that if there is a management-employee buy-out, the shares purchased and owned by the dock workers will be sacrosanct? If dock workers lose their jobs through no fault of their own, will they be able to retain their shares? That is an important point that needs to be clarified this evening because that was not the experience at Medway and elsewhere.

Mr. John D. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is understandably concerned about the security of share ownership. Does he agree that it is important that the shares in the privatised company should not be owned by foreign interests?

Mr. Mackinlay: Absolutely; it is something that exercised us at the time of the sale of Tilbury. Indeed, it still does. Even if a port is sold initially to a management-employee buy-out—with a considerable amount of involvement from banks and other financial institutions—we do not know what will happen in the future. There will be compelling commercial considerations. Ownership and control could pass to the stewardship of people who do not have any loyalty to the locality, to the country or even to the ports industry. There is a great danger of asset stripping.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I was with the hon. Gentleman until his last few remarks. A new owner could have an interest in the ports industry, but in a port that was in competition with Belfast.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is absolutely correct. I am with the right hon. Gentleman all the way. The experience in England is that people will purchase ports with a view to running them down so that they can promote the other port or ports in their ownership.

Quite apart from the selfish interest that could emerge, it is a crazy way to run a ports industry. We are talking about strategic ports, vital to the economy of England in my case, and of Northern Ireland in the case of Belfast —and, indeed, of a large part of the northern part of the Republic of Ireland. The ports' development needs to be planned. Currently there is a delicate, complementary role between Belfast, Larne, Warren Point and the ports on the Foyle. With the absence of planning, England has too many ports, and at some stage some of them will lose out.

I have referred to the port of Dublin, but there are other ports in Ireland. The port of Cork is rightly exploiting the opportunities provided by European grants, to its legitimate advantage. I do not complain about that, but I think it is wrong for us to refer only to Dublin. The fact is that, given the major ports around the island of Ireland, Belfast will be the odd one out.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

The port is strongly identified with Northern Ireland. It is an historic port—one of the great ports of the old empire. The Government should not dismiss its deep association with the city. Clearly they will not reverse their current course tonight, but I hope that in the not too distant future the Minister will state from the Dispatch Box that the Government, on reflection, have decided not to privatise the port but to leave it to the sensible stewardship of the harbour commissioners, with whose membership they will not tamper.

Opposition Members fear that, after the order is passed, there will be a period of uncertainty and disquiet. The harbour commissioners will be in limbo, and there will be anxiety among the work force and the trade unions. The Government should heed the popular view expressed by all Northern Ireland politicians, and the fact that a number of us have experienced the problems associated with port privatisation in other parts of the United Kingdom. A Minister should state from the Dispatch Box, in a matter of weeks, that after due reflection the Government have decided to leave the Belfast port and harbour commissioners to flourish in their enterprise, as they are currently trying to do.

9.32 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who has taken an informed interest in Northern Ireland and shared the concerns of its people.

Last night, winding up the debate, the Minister of State chided Northern Ireland Members for not talking the Province up. We are here tonight to talk the port of Belfast up, because we fear that a port with a proud history may be shunted down a siding—as it were—that would not benefit either the port or the citizens of Belfast.

I should declare an interest, for several reasons. My son-in-law works in the harbour; my great-uncle was first secretary of the Belfast dockers union; I was a minister for 19 years, and part of my parish was the harbour estate; I represent Belfast, South, members of whose city council and corporation—previously—have been commissioners. For all those reasons, I feel that I have a right to speak tonight and to challenge some of the assertions that have been made.

I understand the point that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) was trying to make, but, knowing the kipper trade and the herrings to be found along that coast, I thought that he was bringing a red herring into the debate when he spoke of the wonderful developments on the east coast. In fact, there has been a lamentable decline in Britain's west coast ports. The thrust of the European transport system relates to Dublin, Holyhead and further down—and, on the other side, the main link that will cause congestion around the channel tunnel. Some of us have been arguing for the build-up of the west coast ports, including the ports of Larne and Belfast. In case anyone thinks that there is a problem between Larne and Belfast, I can tell hon. Members that my paternal ancestors came from east Antrim and my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) will realise that I am not trying to encroach on his domain.

Belfast has a proud tradition, but we are now in a period of uncertainty. In a sense we have an elected dictatorship. For years we have been lectured in the House about looking after minority rights. When the minority of the nation represented by its Members in this House combines with trade union officials and business interests to tell the House that this is not the right way to go, we would like to think that there might be second thoughts.

Emphasis has already been placed on the concept of consultation. I have had to challenge the use of English in this place on more than one occasion when we have been told that co-operation was excellent. I always thought that when I received an excellent report, which was very rarely, it could not be much better. Tonight there has been another wonderful use of English. We have been told that two fundamental points came from the discussion period. Those points have not been addressed and the draft order is unamended. If they were fundamental points, surely the Government should have addressed them. I am delighted that on both sides of the House voices have been raised arguing for a proper form of democracy and for proper scrutiny of measures in this place. Some 22 years after the abolition of Stormont, there is no excuse for making a mess of Northern Ireland legislation.

Mr. John D. Taylor: The hon. Member speaks for almost everyone in Northern Ireland when he talks about consultation. Just this weekend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said and wrote that nothing would happen without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. We are talking not just about consultation but about consent. Yet here we have an Order in Council for which consent is not forthcoming from the elected representatives of Northern Ireland. Does the hon. Gentleman not find that the procedure that the Minister is pushing through the House is in total contradiction and rejection of the philosophy expounded by the Secretary of State when he said that consent should be applied?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I share my right hon. Friend's concern about the use of English. Yesterday we talked about the concept of consultation and we discovered that consultation meant very little. It is obvious that consent has the same import in certain branches of English scholarship. I do not know whether it is something to do with American English, but it is not Ulster English or Scots English, where we like to call a spade a spade. We would like to think that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland was being looked for rather than something being imposed on us.

We have praised the development of the harbour estate and the landfill site and reclamation work, but now it is possible that, even allowing for clawbacks, some persons could come in later and profit off the backs of the forebears of the harbour commissioners who over the years have been expanding and developing the port. We believe that that is wrong.

Our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland have done marvellously well in pushing their cause within Europe. That is their responsibility and I do not criticise them, but I indict Her Majesty's Government for not pushing the case of Northern Ireland and its ports.

I asked the Minister a question at the beginning of his speech and I was amazed that he did not have the answer on the tip of his tongue. We have heard that Aberdeen, Ipswich and Poole ports have trust status but have not asked to be privatised. As far as we know, the Government have not pushed for them to be privatised. Why has the order been introduced when other legislation that is more

important to Northern Ireland and affects the everyday life of its citizens is waiting to be considered? The Minister knows that I have been waiting for legislation to deal with road traffic problems in Belfast, but I have been told that there is insufficient time in the legislative programme. We are not getting our priorities right.

I do not want tediously to repeat the points that have been made, but I endorse my colleagues' arguments and I am delighted that they have been reflected on the Government Benches.

9.40 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Article 12 refers to schemes initiated by the Department. In Northern Ireland we believe strongly that "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That should be adhered to and borne in mind at all times.

Regrettably, recent bureaucratic meddling in port affairs in my constituency has been perceived as damaging in the borough of Carrickfergus. A decision has been made to cease commercial operations at the port of Carrickfergus. Was there collusion in Northern Ireland Departments to bring about the decline of Carrickfergus harbour, perhaps to make Belfast harbour even more attractive in the Government's privatisation programme?

The Minister should be aware of the decision taken some time ago in respect of commercial operations at Carrickfergus harbour, which is only 10 miles from Larne. At two public inquiries, it has been suggested that Departments and the council may have misled the commissioners into believing that an alternative port would be developed at Kilroot, but that has not happened. Will finance be made available to Carrickfergus borough council in the event of a decision to rescind the earlier decision to cease commercial operations so that Carrickfergus harbour can be regenerated and redeveloped as a commercial harbour and regain its former principal port status, which it achieved when record tonnages were recorded through the port? Did Northern Ireland Departments promote the scheme to cease commercial activities, and did they encourage the council to believe that it would get a replacement port at Kilroot, for which it would receive private and public funding?

Belfast port has become the principal sea port on the island of Ireland, handling more than 11 million tonnes of trade per annum. The private port of Larne in my constituency has the distinction of being the second busiest ferry port. I have no axe to grind today. I support the retention of the present status of Belfast harbour. Its success was largely attributable to the successful management of the harbour commissioners, who include representatives of the city council and the trade union movement, all motivated by a desire to improve the Northern Ireland economy.

There has been major modernisation and port development. I accept the right of the Government compulsorily to privatise Belfast port, but do they not recognise the potential of that successful port and the disadvantages that would result from a change in its status? Because of the advantages that are about to flow, the ports in the Irish Republic, such as Dublin, will have available grants of up to 85 per cent. for port development. As Belfast is a trust port, its harbour commissioners receive no grants or subsidies from Her Majesty's Government. Retained profits, with assistance from European regional development funds, have financed port redevelopment and modernisation.

The economy of Northern Ireland as a whole benefits from the competitive pricing made possible by good management of all the facilities and assets managed by the Belfast harbour commissioners. Common sense dictates that when all is well there should be no interference. If the Government are determined to interfere, however, the bottom line is that the asset should be secured within the control of the people of Northern Ireland. Is the Treasury so hard up for cash that it has to recoup funds now rather than accept the ongoing annual benefits? I understand that £1 million was paid this year in corporation tax.

All Northern Ireland ports provide competition within Northern Ireland, which has made them attractive to Northern Ireland industry and, indeed, to industry in the Irish Republic, which makes use of our facilities. Millions of pounds every year are being relocated from the profitable private port of Larne and transferred out of the Province. If under privatisation Belfast harbour is lost to Northern Ireland control, its profits, too, will be lost for reinvestment in Northern Ireland. Surely the Minister can accept that the reinvestment of profits generated in Belfast harbour and the ongoing payment of corporation tax make a valuable contribution to the Northern Ireland economy and provide a worthwhile return to the Exchequer for its past investment. I therefore hope that he will accept that variety of management in harbour control has been beneficial and an asset to Northern Ireland, and that he will not proceed with a compulsory privatisation of Belfast harbour.

As I have said, I am conscious of the past advantages of private ownership, which helped to bring about the success and the development of Larne harbour, but I regret that in the present climate, with the greater advantage of EC funding going to the ports of the Irish Republic, the privatisation of Belfast harbour would bring with it serious disadvantages to the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. That would result in higher costs to importers and exporters alike, which could ultimately threaten jobs and employment opportunities beyond Belfast harbour.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I confess to a little puzzlement. Why, in theory or in practice, should one get less money from the EC for the ports in Northern Ireland if they are privatised than if they were in public ownership?

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Lady for that specific question. What she describes is one of the anomalies of European regional development funding; regrettably, therefore, successive Northern Ireland Ministers have not managed to secure equal benefits for private and public ports in the Province. I hope that the Minister will specifically address that question further in his response.

I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) that as a party we judge each case on its merits. We see no merit in the proposed privatisation of Belfast harbour through this enabling legislation and we trust that there will be no future decision compulsorily to require the Belfast harbour commissioners to privatise that harbour.

9.49 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): We have had an interesting debate tonight. It is significant that the only support that the Minister has obtained in this debate has been from the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who represents a constituency on the east coast of England, which does not even face Belfast.

No Northern Ireland Member supports the order and no Labour Member supports the order. I doubt whether, if the Minister or any other Tory went to Belfast, they would find one person who supported the order. That is the extent of the issue. There is no support in the House from Northern Ireland representatives or from the Labour party, and there is no support among the people of Belfast. The Minister should take note of that.

Mr. Beggs: The hon. Gentleman speaks about the absence of support for the policy among the Northern Ireland parties. I remind the hon. Gentleman that only about 5,000 people out of the whole voting population of Northern Ireland supported the Conservative party in the recent elections.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman explains the depth of feeling. I bet that, if we approached Tories in Northern Ireland, they would not support the order, because the port of Belfast is key to the economy of greater Belfast and to the Northern Ireland economy in total. The port accounts for 55 per cent. of all imports and exports to and from Northern Ireland. The order can only mean poorer services and increased port charges, which will have a greater effect on the region than on Great Britain, because Northern Ireland relies on ports for trade and tourism links with the rest of the United Kingdom and the European Community.

The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) asked the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) why a privatised port should receive less grant than a port in public ownership. The Minister explained why in his opening remarks. Here we have a person who will go through the Lobby tonight to condemn the port of Belfast, yet who does not know what the consequences will be. The people of Belfast will suffer because of this legislation.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: From what I know of the European regional fund regulations, I do not believe that what Opposition Members describe will occur. I see no technical reason why the port should not get just as much, one way or another.

Mr. O'Brien: That shows once again that the hon. Lady is not aware of the circumstances or of the problems that she will create for the people of Northern Ireland in general, but in Belfast especially, by the way in which she votes tonight in favour of the order. Therefore, if the hon. Lady has any merit, the least that she could do would be to abstain or to vote against the order, because she is totally confused over the way in which the European Community grants will apply.

When the Minister was questioned, he explained in his opening remarks that the amount of grant received now, while the harbour is in public ownership, is 75 per cent., yet, under privatisation, it drops to 50 per cent.. That point was also made by the hon. Member for Antrim, East and other hon. Members. It will have an effect on the economy of the harbour and the economy of Belfast.

The Government have wanted to claim that the order will improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the port. Obviously, they are saying that privatisation will be a lesser burden on the taxpayer.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I think that the hon. Gentleman is within a hair's breadth of convincing the hon. Lady that it would be wiser to abstain or to vote against the order. It should be pointed out that the Minister made it clear to the House in his opening remarks that, while a grant of up to 75 per cent. would be available if the port was in public ownership, a maximum grant of 50 per cent. would be available if it was a private company, and some of us doubt that it would even get that.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman's point is significant and relevant. However, may I also tell the hon. Member for Lancaster that we were told tonight that, if the port realises £50 million in capital for its sale, 50 per cent. of that capital will go back to the company? In other words, only 50 per cent. of the value of the port and the real estate which goes with it will go to the Exchequer. Therefore, one has to ask why Conservative Members want to privatise a port which is highly efficient and highly profitable, and which helps the people of Belfast and the Province of Northern Ireland. One has to ask why we are in such a position tonight.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): If we take an analogy from Great Britain, from the hon. Gentleman's experience, would he say whether a private port such as Felixstowe had more or less capital investment than some of the publicly owned ports? If he cannot acknowledge that Felixstowe did rather better than most of the publicly owned ports, should he not draw this part of his speech to a speedy conclusion?

Mr. O'Brien: That is another example of a Conservative Member trying to find some solution to justify going through the Lobby to support the order, because, again, the hon. Gentleman is not comparing like with like. Belfast is a trust port. All the resources which are generated from that port go back into the business, or it reduces the charges. It is a trust port; it is not a port where there will be—or where there are at present—any benefits to individuals or to companies.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why the Opposition parties have acquiesced in the disgraceful procedure of putting the matter through by Order in Council, to which he has important, specific detailed objections, when they ought to have been debated by the Opposition through the usual channels in the House?

Mr. O'Brien: If the hon. Gentleman feels that the business that we are discussing tonight should not have been before the House under the Order in Council procedure, we agree with him. The Minister should withdraw the orders and let us discuss the matter in the manner which has been requested by hon. Members. We should discuss the matter in Committee in the proper way, as legislation should be discussed.

Mr. Budgen *indicated assent.*

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman nods his head in agreement. If he holds that view, the least that he can do is abstain from voting tonight. He accepts that the orders have been presented to the House in a disgraceful way. I

feel that more Tory Members share that view. I appeal to them: if that is their view, the least that they can do is abstain from voting tonight.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Is it not the case that the orders should be withdrawn so that we can have a proper debate about the Government's transport policy and see how ports and trust ports fit into the whole issue of transport?

Mr. O'Brien: Obviously, one does not want to move away from discussing the principle of the orders. My colleague has introduced a subject that I do not want to follow.

The orders will create complications and problems. I appeal to Tory Members to listen carefully to what is said, especially by Northern Ireland Members, so that we can put the orders in the proper perspective.

Mr. Budgen: Can the hon. Gentleman explain the official Opposition's position on the matter, because this disgraceful procedure has been supported by both Front Benches for a long time? Is it Labour's position that they will no longer support the use of the Order-in-Council procedure to impose legislation on Northern Ireland without proper discussion?

Mr. O'Brien: Each time we debate an Order in Council in the House or upstairs, we make it clear that the way in which the business is presented is undemocratic.

Tonight, we are debating compulsory orders or enabling legislation relating to privatisation of the port of Belfast. In any language, and in any approach to the matter, one can rightly see that hon. Members who support the Government have not fully realised the consequences of the orders. In that context, the least that the Minister can do is withdraw them and allow us to have a full debate on the issue, allow greater consultation and allow Members of Parliament and the people of Belfast to judge the Government's intentions more openly and freely.

With privatisation, the European grant support which has been so beneficial to the port of Belfast will decrease, if not disappear, as was pointed out earlier. There is also the question whether some of the grant that has been paid should be clawed back. Reference has been made to that in the past, and EC Ministers have said, as has Commissioner Bruce Millan, that there is a possibility of clawing back EC funding. Commissioner Millan also made that clear when we discussed the privatisation of Aldergrove airport. The way in which we judge the orders tonight will only be to the detriment of Belfast, the people of Belfast and the people of Northern Ireland.

As I said, the port of Belfast is a trust port, and the trust port arrangement already ensures that there is fair charging and equal treatment in the allocation of berths and other port facilities. There is a real threat that the ownership of privatised ports will be transferred out of Northern Ireland. The Minister was asked earlier to give an assurance that the ownership of the port of Belfast would not be transferred out of Northern Ireland. Hon. Members ask for that assurance because there is fear that, if foreign investors are allowed to take over the port of Belfast, they will engage in asset-stripping, which will be detrimental to the port and to the Northern Ireland community.

We are also aware that a handsome amount of real estate is attached to the port. That matter must have some bearing on the way in which the port will be disposed of. The regulations under which trust ports operate place a responsibility of care on the various statutory bodies which control ports on behalf and in the interests of people in the hinterland served by the port—the people of Belfast. The port of Belfast operates in the interests of both the citizens of Belfast and the whole Province of Northern Ireland.

The board of the harbour commissioners is representative of port users, the business community, Belfast city council and employees, through their statutory joint negotiating committee, and representatives of the trade unions in Northern Ireland. In other words, the board is entirely accountable for the operation of the port of Belfast. That accountability will go under privatisation. There will be a lack of democracy and accountability to the people of Northern Ireland. Under privatisation, the only people to whom the board will be responsible are the shareholders.

When one considers the backcloth to the order, one cannot but object to the way in which it has been presented tonight. Hon. Members have expressed anxieties about the staff pension fund. We have seen some examples of what has happened to pension funds in other privatisation schemes. Northern Ireland Members have expressed fears that redundancies and unemployment could result from the asset-stripping that might take place.

We must also consider security. At present, the harbour commissioners organise security at the port. It has been suggested that the security force at the port could be part of a privatised police force. That again would be detrimental to the work of the port.

The people of Northern Ireland and a great proportion of people in other parts of Great Britain are opposed to this arrogant attempt to impose the ideology of the Tory party. They are opposed to this privatisation enabling Bill. I urge the Minister to consider the consequences and think about what has been said by hon. Members who represent constituencies in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland. He should withdraw the order tonight. If the order is not withdrawn, we will divide the House and vote against it.

10.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tim Smith): The Labour party has opposed every privatisation measure that has come before the House since 1979.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Smith: May I make some progress, as I have completed one sentence so far?

The Labour party has opposed every privatisation measure which has come before this House since 1979, yet it has no proposals to renationalise any of those industries which have been privatised, apart from having some debate about the future of the water industry.

Mr. William O'Brien: I can assure the House that, if the legislation is not on the statute book before the next general election, the next Labour Government will stop the privatisation.

Mr. Smith: That, of course, was not the point I was making. The fact is that the Labour party has no proposals to reverse any of the privatisation measures which the Government have put in place.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall give way in a moment, but I would like to try to complete my preliminary point.

The Government's privatisation programme has been outstandingly successful. Consumers have benefited, employees have benefited and shareholders have benefited. Even the socialist Government of Greece now proposes to privatise part of its telephone industry. Perhaps one day the Labour party will learn that there are advantages to be gained from privatisation.

Mr. Budgen: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, when analogous legislation was put through this House in respect of the United Kingdom, it was done through the Bill procedure? Will he please explain, if I am right in saying that, how the people of Northern Ireland can have any proper confidence in the Westminster Parliament if the squalid procedure of Order in Council is used, which is used particularly to deprive them of their proper rights of discussion?

Mr. Smith: I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend, and I certainly would not claim that this was a perfect arrangement for the discussion of legislation. I think you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that time simply will not allow for every measure to be included in primary legislation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I am having great difficulty in hearing what the Minister has to say, and I am sure that many hon. Members also want to hear it.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) may not be aware that, when we debated the privatisation of Belfast international airport under similar procedure and allowed three hours for the debate, the whole time was not taken up. That is an interesting indication of the level of interest. We do not rule out primary legislation for Northern Ireland business, but we must make a judgment in each case.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Smith: The difficulty is that we could spend the rest of the debate discussing this issue, and I would not be in a position to reply to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien).

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: May I ask the Minister whether the legislation to which he refers was amendable? Was there any chance—no matter how long we talked on it—that we could have made any difference, or added even a single full stop, to that order?

Mr. Smith: That is my very point. The legislation is not amendable, and I have said that I am sympathetic to the point that has been made. But there we are—that is the situation we are faced with. *[Interruption.]* I must move on, or I shall not be able to reply to any points raised during the debate.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Smith *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Smith: I do not think that there is anything I can usefully add to what I have said.

Mr. Taylor: Will the Minister give way on that subject?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said that the port of Belfast—

Mr. Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are talking about procedure, and I find myself in great sympathy with what the Minister said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point for me at all. I would think that the hon. Gentleman's point is intended to refer to why the Minister is not giving way. The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Smith *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: I need a ruling on what you know, rather than on what you think , Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is up to the Minister to give way or not. He has indicated that he is not giving way.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North asked about the clawback of European grants. In certain circumstances, grants could be clawed back.

Mr. John D. Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a different point of order.

Mr. Taylor: It concerns your decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it right to make a decision on what you think, or on what you know?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair has made a decision, so it should be right.

Mr. Smith: As I was saying, in certain instances European grants could be clawed back. If they were, the amount clawed back would be reduced from the proceeds that went to the Treasury.

Mr. McNamara: The Minister is now saying that we would receive a sum, half of which would go to the company, and that any clawback would not be pro rata with the company but would be straight from the Treasury's take. Gosh, that is marvellous. This is a double Dutch order.

Mr. Smith: That is the position. I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question. We have made no decision about the matter. The order is an enabling measure. But he should remember that, if we decide to go ahead with privatisation, bids will be based on the information that I have just given the House.

Ms Walley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Smith: No, because I want to deal with the hon. Gentleman's second point, about a management-employee buy-out. I agree with him that, in many ways, that would be the most desirable outcome, which is why the order makes special provision for such a buy-out, providing help to those who want to make a bid at the appropriate time.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) was concerned about procedure, should we decide to go ahead with compulsory privatisation. As I said, we have made no decision about that, but if we decided to go ahead, we would want to consider carefully whether the matter should be debated on the Floor of the House. I think that it would probably be debated in response to a prayer.

Mr. Trimble: A few moments ago, in reply to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), the Minister said that he had great sympathy with his view that this matter was being dealt with inadequately. One way in which he could demonstrate that sympathy is by giving a clear undertaking to the House that, in the event of the Government deciding to make an order for privatisation, the matter will be debated in the House in a proper manner. Will he give that clear undertaking now?

Mr. Smith: I do not think that that would be sensible. We are discussing a hypothetical proposition. We shall give the matter careful consideration. Obviously, it depends from where the prayer comes. I think that the matter will be of sufficient importance to warrant a debate. Given that the Government have made no decision about the compulsory privatisation of the port of Belfast, and the fact that we have two years during which we shall want to hear the views of various people, not least the harbour commissioners, it would not be sensible to give such an undertaking now.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way, as I wish to deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), who asked me about the harbour office. The harbour office is a grade A listed building, and it would continue to enjoy that protection even if the port were privatised.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend seriously believe that a procedure that allows for no amendment is a satisfactory way to deal with the privatisation of a port? Why does he carry on in that way if he wants to achieve the support of the people of Northern Ireland for this institution?

Mr. Smith: I have already dealt with my hon. Friend's point. I have nothing to add to what I have already said.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) was concerned about the environment and areas of special scientific interest. We would want to take that important matter into consideration if we were considering the compulsory privatisation of the port, but that ASSI status will remain, and the area will enjoy the same protection whether the business remains in the public sector or not.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) brought to bear his experience and knowledge of the port of Immingham and the success that the port has enjoyed following privatisation. Many ports in Great Britain have enjoyed similar success following privatisation, which is why I believe that, in certain circumstances, Belfast could benefit similarly.

Ms Walley: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but does he accept that there is a difference between voluntary privatisation of trust ports and compulsory privatisation of trust ports, which cannot be properly debated in this place?

Mr. Smith: I certainly accept that there is a difference, and this is an enabling measure. First, we want to discover the opinion of the Belfast harbour commissioners. We want to find out whether they bring forward their own voluntary scheme in the next two years. It will be open to us, as a matter of law, to consider compulsory privatisation only in two years' time. Many of the important matters mentioned in the debate will be relevant to that consideration.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) acknowledged that some advantages would accrue from privatisation, and I welcome that. Obviously, there are some very strong arguments in favour of privatisation, and some arguments against it have been adduced during the debate.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) was especially worried about the Belfast harbour police. The Belfast harbour commissioners, as the port authority for Belfast harbour, appoint and employ harbour police by virtue of section 79 of the Harbours, Docks, and Piers Clauses Act 1847, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The responsibility of the harbour police force is to employ a general policing and security service for the harbour estate, which comprises about 2,000 acres, as the hon. Gentleman said.

Training of recruits in general policing matters is carried out by senior officers of the force. All new recruits are given short-term training by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Training of members of the force in the use of firearms is carried out by a senior harbour police arms instructor, who is a fully qualified instructor, trained by the RUC. Members of the force receive refresher courses in the use of firearms every six months, and each member is issued with written instructions regarding the circumstances in which firearms may be used.

Mr. Mackinlay: What will happen in future?

Mr. Smith: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that in future the same arrangements will prevail. There will be no change in the present arrangements when—if—the port is privatised. If the port is privatised, there will be the same arrangements for the harbour police.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Minister take the opportunity, as he has the Floor, to explain to those of us who oppose the proposal for privatisation or enabling legislation what he regards as the advantages, if any, that will flow to Belfast harbour commissioners from privatisation?

Mr. Smith: Given the record of ports privatisation in Great Britain, I believe that considerable good news could follow, as business has held up well in those ports in spite of the recession; there has been a big improvement in productivity; financial reconstruction and rationalisation are continuing; employee involvement in the industry has been extended significantly; managers are being given the freedom to manage, and are actively seeking out and developing new business opportunities. The Government have made no decision about the privatisation of Belfast port, but I believe that those are some of the advantages that could accrue if they did decide to proceed.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Minister take on board the point that the experience in England is not relevant to a position where one will be disadvantaging Belfast significantly with regard to the capital that it can raise compared with its

[Mr. Trimble]

competitor? What does he say about the position with regard to European development money, where our grant will be cut from 75 per cent. to 50 per cent. or less, so we shall be disadvantaged?

Mr. Smith: I dealt with that matter earlier.

It being three hours after the motion had been entered upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [24 June].*

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 220

Division No. 276] **[10.24 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark

Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. John Spellar.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Ports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 19th January, be approved.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Question on the other motion to be decided at that hour.*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Ports (Northern Ireland Consequential Provisions) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 19th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Fenchurch Street Line

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

10.36 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): All hon. Members are rightly looking forward to the summer recess. It gives us an opportunity to spend more time with our families. In my case that is initially a novelty. Over the past few years my summer recesses have been ruined by the breaking of a number of political storms. For example, one year the local health authority decided that it would close Basildon and Thurrock accident and emergency unit. Two days before the proposed closure, following a bloody row, we managed to keep the unit open and it is now the finest in the country.

Last year, the post office in Pitsea announced its closure and Tesco decided that it wanted to be the first to have a post office in one of its superstores. The whole matter developed into a fiasco and it was badly handled by both the protagonists.

Tonight, I want to share with the House the fact that on 23 July, for the first time in recent history, a main line station—Fenchurch Street—will close for seven weeks. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has agreed with me that it is appropriate to allow our hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) to intervene in the debate, should they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Sadly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) could not be here this evening, but I know that he supports the thrust of my argument.

The closure of Fenchurch Street station will undoubtedly have a devastating effect on a huge number of our constituents. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will comment on British Rail's closure arrangements, and also make some general remarks about the programme for the privatisation of the Fenchurch Street line.

We all know that travelling in itself is not a pleasurable experience. Certainly it has not been a pleasurable experience for many commuters in our wonderful part of Essex. I must be very careful about how I relay the awful experience that I shared with my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and other hon. Members when we rode in a railway carriage with the present chairman of British Rail. I say that I must be careful because on the last occasion when I mentioned that experience in the House what I said was deliberately misinterpreted by some of our local socialist councillors, who do not commute to London and who also do not work. The journey that we shared with the chairman of British Rail was fairly frivolous: its purpose was to enable the chairman to experience the awful travelling conditions with us, although I am afraid that he did not acquit himself terribly well during the journey.

I make no criticism of the women and men who work for British Rail; they do a magnificent job. What they require is leadership. It is no good senior management of British Rail bleating when we embark on a privatisation programme if they do not accept responsibility and line up behind the Government.

My constituency contains three stations—Pitsea, Laindon and Basildon. In spite of the economic downturn, an increasing number of my constituents now commute to London; indeed, I think it would be fair to say that Basildon's constituents are the life blood of many firms in London. Sadly, however, their mode of travel means that they are often treated like cattle: the station has poor facilities in terms of toilets, restaurants, seating and access for the disabled.

When people actually get on to the trains, they are squashed together—which is not always a pleasurable experience. At one point the service was so bad that British Rail gave out postcards to people getting off the trains, with a number of boxes for people to tick with the excuse that they could give their employers that day. On the return journey, travellers often found that they had to get off at Horndon on the Hill and walk down the track to their destinations. As if that were not bad enough, there are examples of trains going right through their stations. The line has been an absolute shambles, and the current industrial dispute—which Labour, as ever, supports: whatever the strike, Labour supports it regardless of the merits of the argument—is symptom ic of the problem.

I do not wish to be churlish; I pay tribute to our own rail network, which will offer some sort of service tomorrow. I think it is magnificent that the network has done everything possible to get our commuters to their destination throughout this ridiculous dispute.

In one sense, the LTS—London, Tilbury and Southend—newsline customer letter, issued in spring this year, contained good news. It told us that vital engineering work was being carried out as part of an £83 million resignalling project, including renewal of tracks, overhead electrification and signalling between Fenchurch Street and Limehouse. According to the newsletter, much of the project has been completed owing to work being scheduled to take place at weekends and during the night. It states:

"We know this work will cause severe disruption for many of our customers and we have looked at other options. Unfortunately, the temporary closure of Fenchurch Street Station is essential if this part of the work is to be completed in the shortest time.

The date has been specifically chosen to be at a time when many passengers take their holiday and we hope that this advance warning will encourage others to take theirs at the same time."

Well, really. I hardly think that it will go down well with employers in London if everyone in our part of Essex decides to go on holiday and the idea that some of our constituents can take seven weeks off work is ridiculous.

The letter goes on:

"We are working closely with London Underground and Great Eastern to provide adequate alternatives but we realise that this closure will cause inconvenience to many of our passengers."

It certainly will cause inconvenience. It is being suggested that people from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East will be travelling to Liverpool Street station. I commuted to Liverpool Street for many years. I pay tribute to the Government for the wonderful way in which Liverpool Sreet has been transformed. However, Liverpool Street station is not that near to Fenchurch Street station and that will cause considerable difficulty for many of our constituents.

I must ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether he really believes that LTS has correctly estimated and seriously thought through the enormous disruption and convenience to some 30,000 users of the line. Business these days is tough and making a sustainable profit is not easy. Employers' patience is already well stretched with genuine excuses from our constituents. It is not good enough in this day and age to say, "My train was late." I question whether the closure is necessary or whether the

work could be done in the evening or at the weekend. I hope, for goodness sake, that we will not have the usual fiasco throughout the seven weeks where the work is done for the convenience of the contractors and that they fail to work all day and all night. We must ensure that the work is carried out throughout the entire seven weeks and that it is done to the highest possible quality because a huge amount of public money is being spent on this exercise.

The arrangements during the enforced closure are less than adequate. The press release from LTS dated 16 June is entitled:

"Thanks a Million—LTS Rail gives its commuters a million pound loyalty payment."

Who is kidding who? I hardly think that that is a windfall for our constituents. Anyone with any competence in mathematics can work out that a £50 rail voucher divided over seven weeks is not a great deal of money in compensation. Over the years, our constituents deserve better treatment than that. The offer is vague and totally inadequate.

LTS is suggesting that passengers spread their travelling time by travelling a little later or a little earlier than normal so as to avoid overcrowding. Here we go again. For whose convenience is the service operating? It should be operating for the fare-paying passengers. British Rail is not paying people to use the trains. Some of my constituents want to cash in a proportion of their yearly season ticket to cover the seven weeks and use alternative transport. It is totally unacceptable that at the moment British Rail is saying no. I hope that LTS will look again at its arrangements.

LTS says that the station is scheduled to reopen on 11 September. I do not believe that the advertisements have given us sufficient information. I wish that our wonderful River Thames could be used throughout the disruption. However, I inquired today to find that the journey from Tilbury to the City takes three hours, so that is not a sensible proposal. However, I am sure that people could come up with other alternatives.

The Labour party does not support privatisation. Let there be no doubt in the minds of our constituents that the Labour party has always opposed privatisation. My constituents could not care less who runs British Rail as long as the journey is comfortable, delivered at an economic price and the trains get to the stations on time. The hypocrisy of socialists is shown clearly when they say to people on their doorsteps, "Isn't it shocking that your taxes are going up? What we need is more investment in British Rail." Where the devil do they think that such investment will come from?

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Amess: No, I will not.

That investment will come from increased taxes. The idea that there is some nest egg where the money will come from is nonsense. Socialists must be honest with the general public. If the general public are not happy with the amount of taxes that is being collected now, they will never be happy with the taxation that the socialists have in mind for us.

Mr. Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hope that it is a genuine point of order; this is only a half-hour debate.

Mr. Mackinlay: Of course it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I have your guidance? The subject of this debate is exactly the same as the subject that I raised on the Adjournment some time ago. I invited the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) to join me for that debate, which was held in the early hours of the morning. He did not support me; I sat alone with the Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As I suspected, that is not a genuine point of order but a misuse of the House's time and it is unfair on the hon. Member who has the half-hour Adjournment debate.

Mr. Amess: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member is wrong. I phoned the Table Office at 4.30 am, but the debate had been held earlier. I am afraid that the days of honourable behaviour seem to be out of fashion. *[Interruption.]*

Can my right hon. Friend tell us who the bidders are for the Fenchurch Street line, what service they are offering managers and the general public and how precisely the privatisation programme will be carried out? *[Interruption.]* Socialists could not care less about the rail service. They are interested only in how people vote, which is why they tried to target my constituency in the 1992 election. It did not work then, and I intend to ensure that it does not work next time.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Amess: No, I will not.

Socialists spread their poison by telling the general public that services will deteriorate and that fares will rocket. It is a joke to suggest that services will deteriorate. They say that there will not be an off-peak service and that people will lose their travel cards and their concessionary fares. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us some answers and make this a happy summer recess for everyone and ensure that our constituents get a better deal than the one announced by London, Tilbury and Southend.

10.52 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I congratulate my hon. and dear Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on initiating a debate on a matter that concerns so many of our constituents—trying to ensure that they get a fair deal from British Rail while it still exists. Thank goodness it is now being phased out.

I should like to say how much I appreciate the presence of my right hon. Friend the Minister. We know that he is here on duty and how much he cares about the Fenchurch Street line—the misery line—which has been one of the disgraces of our public railway service for many years and on which our constituents have experienced the misery of travelling. Not only have signals failed over and again but carriages have been packed. We even had a dead sheep on the line that had not been removed, which gave new meaning to the phrase, "travelling like cattle".

I congratulate the Government on their recent £50 million investment in reviving signals on the line. They have done the best that they can in a hopeless situation. As we have now had the good sense to bring in the private

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

sector, I look forward, as I have for many years, to hearing the good news of the company that is likely to get to run our railway. Nobody could possibly run it more inefficiently and ineffectively than British Rail. I congratulate and support my hon. Friend, and look forward with great pleasure to what the Minister is to tell us.

10.54 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the Minister agree that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) should speak in the debate? There are only 12 minutes of it left.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman) *indicated assent.*

Dr. Spink: I shall be very brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As well as the resignalling project—I congratulate the Government on providing the funds for that £100 million project—two further advances are needed. One is new rolling stock, and 25 of the 317 sliding-door trains will cascade down from the great northern line to our line at the end of 1995. That will be a great advantage to all our constituents.

The other great change needed is an improvement in the management and worker culture, methods and motivation on our line. That will come through the franchise arrangements, which I strongly welcome. I understand that the new management team of LTS Rail, headed by Chris Kinchin-Smith, has now formally registered its intention to bid for the franchise, with employee participation.

I welcome that, but I tell those people that over the coming months we shall watch most carefully developments in the culture, attitudes and motivation of managers and employees on the line. We shall watch especially carefully the way in which they handle the resignalling project. I hope that they will take on board the points so eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

10.56 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on the great fight that he is putting up for Basildon and for rail passengers—*[Interruption.]*—despite the harassment from the Opposition, which seems quite out of place.

I want to make two points. First, we are delighted that the resignalling is going ahead. The line has been starved of investment and it is great that we are to get new signalling, especially as some of the signalling for Fenchurch Street is a little older than me. New signalling represents a big step forward.

Secondly, it must be said that, although the line has been dreadful, there has been a dramatic improvement since Chris Kinchin-Smith and his predecessor took over. My constituents feel that things are getting much better.

I also want to ask two questions. First, when on earth will the Government tell us what is the profit or loss on the Fenchurch Street line? I have been asking that question for years, and the Minister says that he will tell me when the time is ripe. That is rather like the Government saying that they will tell me when we shall reform the common agricultural policy. I should like to know the figures.

Secondly, could the Minister tell us what the benefits of privatisation will be? Unlike the young enthusiasts, as one of the older Members, I have always had some doubts in my mind. However, as we shall be one of the first lines to be privatised, we shall probably derive some bonuses.

The people of Southend have had a bad time. Things are getting a bit better now, but we should like to know what the glorious opportunities ahead are. Will we get cheaper fares? That would be great. Will we get newer trains? That would be great too. If the Minister would say when the time will be ripe to tell us the actual financial position of the Fenchurch Street line, I should be more than grateful. Of course, we pay tribute to the huge interest that he has taken in the line.

10.58 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I pay tribute to my colleagues, not only to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), who led them, but to my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for their continued interest in the future of the line.

Clearly the resignalling scheme is essential; it will cost about £100 million. The signalling system is worn out, and the reason for 20 per cent. of the faults on the line is that system's ineffectiveness. Everyone welcomes the resignalling.

It is a radical solution to close the station for seven weeks, but I have looked into the question carefully and sought advice from the railway experts, especially those at Railtrack, and I am convinced that closure for seven weeks, although a great burden upon my hon. Friends' constituents, is better than the alternative, which could well be three or more years of part-time working at nights and weekends. That is no way to run a railway. Indeed, I had ministerial responsibility for the docklands light railway, and we all learnt something from that about the ability to run a railway and to improve the infrastructure. Seven weeks is a relatively short period, and I believe that it represents the correct way forward, bearing in mind that the signal box has to be removed, the track realigned at the station and all the old signalling removed.

Are the alternatives capable of handling the 25,000 to 30,000 commuters? I believe so, especially for those from Laindon, Basildon and Pitsea. I have looked into the alternatives. They include London, Tilbury and Southend trains crossing over to the Great Eastern line and running into Liverpool Street. We believe that some passengers will take that option—perhaps a half. Some trains will run through to Barking and passengers will be able to get off at either Upminster or Barking. Their tickets will be valid on the underground, so they can take the District line services into Tower Hill, Aldgate East and Liverpool Street. There will be a shuttle rail service from Upminster to Romford on the Great Eastern line and more trains will stop at Romford on the Great Eastern Line. Finally, there will be buses to take passengers who prefer to get on the Great Eastern line directly. I can confirm that LTS season tickets will be valid on the buses and on the underground, so there will be no additional payments.

I can also tell the House that Ministers will watch developments in July, August and September. There will be duty Ministers, including myself, in the Department. If there are complaints from the travelling public or from

Members of Parliament, we shall pay immediate attention to them. I can also tell my hon. Friends that we shall ensure that there is a free telephone line for passengers to ask about the availability of alternative services and to complain if the alternative services are not available. I understand that leaflets for passengers will be published shortly. Indeed, there will be an exhibition at Fenchurch Street this Friday.

On franchising, to answer my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East in particular, let me describe the chronology of events and then go on to say what I think the advantages are. We intend that the LTS line should be in the first group of franchises. The intention is that it will be franchised by the end of next year. The pre-qualification procedure will commence at the end of 1994 and the tender documentation will go out to the potential franchisees some time in the spring of next year. I shall then be able to answer my hon. Friend's question because we shall publish the financial data on that line and the other five lines in the first six on or about 1 April 1995.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: I shall not. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. I have only a few minutes.

That data will be made available to the House in as much detail as possible because it is a matter of great interest not only to my hon. Friends but to others. I believe that with the line resignalled—we expect that to be completed by next April—and with new modern rolling stock, which will not replace all the rolling stock on the line but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point rightly said, will improve the existing stock—a process that I hope will continue through franchising—we shall have a line that, when it is franchised, will be a first-class performer.

There is interest, and not only from the existing management group. I pay tribute to what the management have achieved. Indeed, I dissociate myself from the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon about the chairman of British Rail. I understand his comments, but I pay tribute to what the chairman, other senior managers and, in particular, the management of the LTS line have achieved. I have looked up the figures for punctuality. We have gone from 78.6 per cent. in 1991, to 89.7 per cent. in 1992 and to 92.8 per cent. in 1993. That is a remarkable achievement, bearing in mind that we do not yet have the fruits of fresh investment in the line. That is a tribute to the management and staff of the line, together with the interest taken by my hon. Friends and by the Department of Transport. They have encouraged and drawn to the attention of the British Rail management the need to improve services. That is a real improvement in punctuality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East asked what the advantages are and why we are going through the whole process. We have debated the matter many times before. There are three main advantages. The first is that we shall bring additional private sector capital on to the railways. When the franchise is let, it will have access to private sector capital. That will undoubtedly produce an improvement in investment. It will not happen overnight, but we shall see improvements in the facilities at stations, the improvement of car parking and better information systems available to the travelling public because we shall be freed from Treasury restraint and from the Department's budget.

Secondly, we shall have a management system delegated to the management and the owners of the line. The present management of the LTS line will be involved in future in running the line, whoever is the owner of the franchise company. I very much hope that the present management group will have an equity interest—I hope, a significant equity interest—in the franchise company. I hope that that hope turns out to be reality. However, we want other companies to participate in the franchising process and I am quite confident that that will happen.

I forecast that we shall also get a reduction in fares on the line—not necessarily in the peak period, that would be too much to ask, but for off-peak services, excursion service and contracted services.

Mr. Wilson *rose—*

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me, but I hope that he will forgive me if I respond to the debate. I forecast that we will get those reductions in fares, which will bring a wider benefit to the travelling public. I invite my hon. Friends to visit the line for the ninth time as and when we have franchising.

I believe that, when it is franchised, "the misery line", as it has been depicted in the past, will turn out to mean that the London, Tilbury to Southend line, as a privatised line, will be one of the most successful lines serving the London terminuses. I repeat the commitment that I have given to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon that, during the summer and the seven weeks of inconvenience and disruption, which I believe is sadly inevitable in the best interests of the railway to get the job done quickly, Ministers at the Department of Transport will monitor the situation. We want as few as possible of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon to be inconvenienced. I am quite certain that, with co-operation, with the determination of Railtrack and the management of the London, Tilbury to Southend line, the job will be done properly and quickly and will be completed on time.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

DUNHAM BRIDGE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL [*Lords*]

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Review

1. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the local government review.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Mr. David Curry): The Local Government Commission has submitted final recommendations for 10 shire county areas. It has published draft recommendations for 11 areas, and will publish its draft reports for a further 19 in July. It is on course to produce all its final reports by the end of the year.

Mr. Milburn: Is the Minister aware of the widespread support for single-tier authorities in many parts of the country, especially in former county boroughs such as Darlington? Is he also aware, however, that the rerunning of the local government review in County Durham has caused great uncertainty among local authority staff, and great anger among local residents? What assurances can the Minister give that he will not reject for a second time the overwhelming popular consensus in my town in favour of Darlington's running all its own local services?

Mr. Curry: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern for Darlington; indeed, he has been to see me about it. The commission will produce its draft for County Durham—which, of course, includes Darlington—on 12 July. I cannot judge the reaction to that draft, as I do not know what it will contain, but we are all anxious for the process to move forward, for the uncertainty to end and for proper dispositions to be made. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that what we need now is a sensible implementation of the proposals: at present, rather too many people appear to want to engage in trench warfare.

Mr. David Nicholson: No doubt my hon. Friend will wish to welcome yesterday's decision by the High Court. Most Conservative Members do not believe that such matters should be resolved through resort to litigation, and I think that we all support the commission's proposals for Avon, Cleveland and many other areas. Will my hon. Friend bear in mind, however, the fact that—like my three right hon. and hon. Friends representing Somerset constituencies—I am still strongly opposed to its proposals for Somerset?

Mr. Curry: I do, of course, welcome the court's ruling, but I must add that all it does is leave us where we wanted to be. I think that we should be a little cautious before we contemplate allowing every council in the land to decide to indulge in trench warfare through the courts: that will add to the uncertainty of the process.

We do not have a great uniform mandate, or a secret plan to impose uniformity everywhere. I know my hon. Friend's views and those of his colleagues who represent Somerset. We shall have to take our view in a considered way when it is a sensible time to do so. I welcome what my hon. Friend said, but he will recognise that I am in the business not of imposing a draconian plan but of introducing sensible measures to serve local government, focused on the delivery of services. That is at the heart of the review.

Mr. Mandelson: Will the Minister reaffirm the Government's strong determination to create four unitary district-based councils in the present county of Cleveland? In addition to the Local Government Commission, the overwhelming majority of the public, most local Members of Parliament, the Government themselves and now the High Court, too, support his opinion. Only the House of Commons has so far not been asked to express a view, and we expect that to happen with the minimum of delay.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Government have expressed their view on the future of the Cleveland area—that the present county council should be succeeded by four district-based unitary authorities. The legal processes are not yet exhausted, as the hon. Gentleman will know, and I am reflecting on the situation in Cleveland. I hope that all those concerned will accept that it is now important to end the uncertainty so that we can get on with the business of change in a sensible measured way and ensure that it works.

Mr. Bates: Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to consider carefully the judgment reached yesterday in the High Court? It was a clear vindication of the way in which the commission conducted its affairs in Cleveland, and of the decision that it reached to abolish Cleveland county council. Will my hon. Friend therefore now consider an investigation into the way in which Cleveland county council has wasted tens of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money in bringing that bogus case to the High Court in a vain attempt to save its own neck at the taxpayers' expense?

Mr. Curry: The fact that the High Court has vindicated the position of the commission and the Government so completely is most helpful. I hope that all those concerned will realise that now the sensible step is to implement, so that services will be assured. The case has been argued exhaustively in the political and the legal arena, and it is now time to bring it to a conclusion and get on with the business of change so that people can see that it will work and so that we can put the services first. That is what the process is about.

Mr. Straw: As the Minister has spoken about the uncertainty surrounding the review, does he accept that if, before the general election, the Government had accepted the Labour amendment to the Local Government Act 1992—the Act which established the review—the uncertainty would not have arisen?

I shall ask the Minister two questions, about staff and about start-up elections. Given the high degree of anxiety among staff about the review, will the Minister accept that the undertakings on staff transfer given by the former Secretary of State on 2 November 1992, which were to transfer the "vast majority" of staff automatically, and to provide proper compensation for those not transferred, must be honoured in full? Does he also accept that start-up elections for all councillors must be held at the beginning of any transfer period in every new unitary council, including those based on existing districts?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman asked two questions. As for the elections, I am now reflecting on whether it is still feasible to set up the successor authorities in Cleveland directly next May. There has been a significant delay, and the important aim is that the system should get off the ground effectively, with sensible arrangements.

On staffing, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are consulting now on draft compensation terms for staff up to the age of 50. Those terms are for general use as well as for specific use in the local government reorganisation, and they would mean that someone up to the age of 50 could receive compensation worth 66 weeks' salary—the present maximum is 24½ weeks'. There are also mandatory safety net proposals specific to the local government reorganisation, and generous enhanced pension arrangements for people over 50.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will meet Unison and the associations next week, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or I will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss those matters. This is a consultation document, and clearly, we take consultation seriously.

Right to Buy

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes have been sold under right-to-buy legislation in (a) Ealing borough and (b) the rest of the country; what plans he has to extend the right to buy; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): Public sector landlords in England have sold about 1.5 million homes since 1980. Some 1,166,000 of those were right-to-buy sales by local authorities, including around 6,000 sold by Ealing. We have no immediate plans to extend the right to buy further.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that no council tenant in Ealing or in any other part of the country would have had the right to buy his or her home if the Labour party had had its way? The bitterness with which Labour opposed the right to buy had to be seen to be believed. Has not the time now come to make equal citizens of all tenants in the public sector, including housing association tenants? Has not the time come to extend the right to buy to them—whatever the Labour party says?

Mr. Gummer: It is interesting that the Labour party has opposed every single housing reform presented by the Government, then, when it has found that it is unpopular with the electorate, it has gradually had to give way. The fact is that there would be no right to buy if this Government had not been in power. The Labour party has no ideas about how to improve our housing stock.

On the two occasions on which the extension of the right to buy has been put before the Houses of Parliament, it has not been carried. There is now, of course, considerable support for house building by the private sector as well as by the housing associations, so the situation is rather different.

Mr. Khabra: During the last year of the Labour Government, 100,000 houses were built. Last year, only 1,000 houses were built. The housing associations cannot fill that gap. Is not it common sense for the Government to allow councils to replace those assets and to make a contribution towards the Government's so-called stated objective of reducing the number of families who suffer the hardships of overcrowding and homelessness?

Mr. Gummer: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the fact is that housing associations are making a major contribution. In the areas where local authorities have sensibly sold their entire stock to housing associations, those who live as tenants of housing associations find that the arrangements are very much better. I hope to see a further extension of that. The hon. Gentleman talks with expertise about the London borough of Ealing. There is no doubt whatever that the performance of the Conservatives in Ealing far outweighed that of the Labour council which we now, sadly, have.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend clearly recognises that there is a desire on the part of housing association tenants for the right to buy. May I press him a little further on a commitment by the Government to extending the right to buy to housing association tenants?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend will agree that the situation has changed somewhat. Significant private investment is now taking place in housing associations which must make the situation rather different. It is a matter of fact that on the two occasions on which the other place was presented with the opportunity to extend the right to buy, it decided that it was not prepared to go along that route. However, I am always open to suggestions and I am happy to talk to my hon. Friend about the matter.

Air Quality

4. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made as to the relative risks of various forms of motor vehicle fuel for United Kingdom air quality.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins): Our assessments of the effects of various motor fuels on air quality have, over time, resulted in the introduction of unleaded petrol and a significant reduction in the use of lead in petrol. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will shortly lay before the House regulations that will lower petrol volatility and further reduce the sulphur content of diesel.

Mrs. Mahon: Given the growing problem of asthma, which has almost doubled in every region of Britain over the past 10 years, and the growing evidence that hydrocarbons and benzene cause cancer, is not it time for the Government to take a good, hard look at the problem and to start working towards a good public transport system so that we can reduce airborne emissions which do so much harm?

Mr. Atkins: As the parent of a severe asthma sufferer, I have some sympathy with the earlier part of the hon. Lady's question. However, I do not think that whether transport is private or public makes any difference to emissions—whether diesel or petrol—and the hon. Lady should clarify that in her mind. She is certainly right to suggest that the Government ought to be doing something about the matter—and we are.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that natural gas vehicles, especially light vans and lorries, contribute greatly to the reduction of pollution and noise? Will he seek to ensure, with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, that there are no tax barriers to the introduction of more of those vehicles, as that would make our streets and communities cleaner and quieter?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point as usual. I will convey his thoughts to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Following the report of the urban air quality review group, which I know the Minister has seen, and its recommendation to the effect that diesel fuel is now not environmentally good news, will the hon. Gentleman seriously consider, with Ministers at the Department of Transport, giving advice to consumers on what is the most environmentally acceptable form of fuel for the private motor car and what is the most environmentally sound form of transport? Perhaps that would be a better use of star ratings than giving them to hospitals in the health service.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman asks an extremely confused question. I shall endeavour not to give him a confused reply. It is true that any fuel used in any vehicle cannot be said to be completely safe—of course it cannot. Therefore, the work being done by my Department, the Department of Transport and the Department of Health among others to investigate the pros and cons—the advantages and disadvantages—of different fuels is continuing. When we know which is best, we shall be in a better to position to provide answers to the hon. Gentleman's questions. Until that time, I will not be drawn.

Mr. George Howarth: I thank the Minister for that helpful answer. Does he agree that each form of fuel available for use in motor cars has its own risks? Does he also accept that, bearing in mind the problems with lead in some fuels, with benzene in other fuels and with particulates in diesel, the choice of which fuel to use is a baffling one from the motorist's point of view? Does he accept the European Commission expert committee's recommendation that there should be a full assessment in each member state of the relative risks of each fuel?

Mr. Atkins: With my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic, I chair the green motoring forum, which exists to draw together those in the industry and those working in environmental areas to try to establish the answers to just the sort of questions that the hon. Gentleman asked—so, he has a fair point. I know that there is some confusion and, as a driver of both a diesel car and a petrol car—[HON. MEMBERS: "Simultaneously?"]—not simultaneously—I should be interested to hear the specialist advice. We are certainly abiding by everything that the EC Commission has asked us to and we will continue that.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems about emissions into the atmosphere is that they come not from new vehicles, whatever their power source, but from used vehicles that have not been properly maintained? Would he therefore consider discussing with colleagues in the Department of Transport a tightening up of the MOT so that we can set an emissions standard for used vehicles?

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When I was the Minister responsible for roads, I was instrumental in bringing the emissions test into the MOT, so I have considerable sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. It is imperative that that standard should be improved year on year, so that we address the problems of used and old cars.

Pilot Projects

5. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Government's view on the use of local authorities for pilot projects for possible future national schemes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): Where the development of new initiatives for local government is best undertaken by using pilot projects, we naturally welcome the assistance of local authorities with such projects.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister look at the current practice in the United States, where state and city councils have the freedom and the funding to pilot environmental, social and work schemes, the best of which can be taken up by the national Government? By contrast, in this country, local authorities are under uniform restrictions, which stop them responding to the new in a diverse and innovative way. Why does not the Minister free up local authorities so that some creative programmes may emerge?

Mr. Baldry: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been recently. If he visits any local authority in the country, he will see that the authorities are all busy working up bids for the single regeneration budget to enable them to do exactly what he is suggesting.

Mr. Dunn: Can the Minister give an assurance that no pilot projects relating to housing matters will be given to inner-London Labour-controlled councils, as those councils have presided over incompetence, corruption and scandal in their housing departments and have in their stocks many thousands of houses available for letting to homeless people which they cannot possibly carry forward?

Mr. Baldry: The record of the inner-London boroughs speaks for itself.

Mr. Vaz: Can the Minister tell the House what has become of the pilot project, city pride, which was launched by the Secretary of State on 14 November last year? Can

he tell us the amount of resources that has been allocated by the Government to the excellent councils of Birmingham and Manchester? When does he intend to extend that pilot project to other local authorities in Britain —or is this, like all the other inner-city projects launched by the Government, a project launched in a blaze of glory and forgotten six months later?

Mr. Baldry: City pride is not a pilot project; it is an initiative to take forward pride in the cities. I was in Birmingham on Monday, and I am glad to say that Birmingham council is making good progress with city pride. I have absolutely no doubt that it will be building on what has also been done in Manchester. There is, of course, absolutely nothing to stop other authorities developing best practice, looking at what is happening with city pride and pursuing similar initiatives.

The hon. Gentleman must also go around and look at what local authorities are doing in working up bids for the single regeneration budget, by means of which they will also be able to encourage pride in their own cities and undertake a whole host of initiatives which we are helping to fund.

Mr. Dickens: Returning to the original question from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), does my hon. Friend agree that representatives of the Department of the Environment have been to America to look at its schemes? The city challenge scheme was started in America and was introduced in this country. We have also had lots of local initiatives, such as estate action schemes, which are very popular. We have more initiatives than any other Government have put forward relying on pilot schemes with local government.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. With initiatives such as city challenge, housing action trusts and estate action, which give greater freedom and greater responsibility to local tenants and local communities, we do not need to go to the Americans. I am glad to say that many people are coming to this country to see the success of our inner-city initiatives.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

6. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest are currently at risk from proposed developments.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend maintains no central record of development proposals. Local planning authorities are statutorily required to consult English Nature over planning applications which are likely to affect sites of special scientific interest. All relevant considerations are taken into account at this stage in the planning process.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Undoubtedly, the Minister is aware that some 300 sites of special scientific interest have been damaged in the past two years, and that the National Audit Office, in its report last month, says that the damage is understated? Can the Minister give an assurance that when the habitats directive is implemented and the special areas of conservation are designated, that will not lead to an erosion of the already inadequate protection of those sites of special scientific interest that have not been designated? As 160 sites are threatened by the Government's roads programme, before the Secretary of State leaves office, can he give an assurance about the future safety of Oxleas wood?

Mr. Atkins: We are proud of our record on sites of special scientific interest. A suggestion by any Labour Member that there has been substantial damage is at complete variance with the facts. We are talking about a small number. Since 1987, only one site has been lost completely; of the other existing sites, less than 3 per cent. have been damaged, and that damage will be restored in time. The hon. Gentleman asks a sensible question about the eventual transposition of the habitats directive and what it will do. I can certainly give him the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Has my hon. Friend noted that Ashenbank wood in the parish of Cobham in my constituency is a site of special scientific interest and stands directly in the route of that very large project, the high-speed rail link? Will he, together with his colleagues at the Department of Transport, ensure that the environment is safeguarded at that point?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is a doughty fighter for his constituents' interests. If he would like to talk to me after Question Time, I am sure that we can arrange to discuss the matter so that I can do what I can to help.

Mr. Chris Smith: Is not it scandalous that no central record is kept by the Government of potentially damaging developments at the most precious ecological sites in this country? How can the Government possibly be proud of the fact that more than 300 SSSIs have been damaged in past two years? When on earth will the Government come forward with proper proposals to implement the European habitats directive? Will it be a half-baked, inadequate attempt which is brought in at the last possible moment, as so often is the case under this Government?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is using synthetic indignation. He knows full well that the Government's record on SSSIs, on the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and on a variety of other environmental activities is far better than that of his party and of the Labour Government. What is more, the hon. Gentleman knows that environmental groups do not think that the Labour party's policy stands up to ours.

Mr. Waterson: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to discuss with the Secretary of State his visit to Beachy Head in my constituency, a very well-known SSSI which, until relatively recently, was threatened by a massive over-development sponsored by the Liberal Democrats majority on the borough council?

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend tells me that he went to the edge, looked over and decided that he was very much against what was being suggested. I will take on board what my hon. Friend says and endeavour to ensure that what he wants happens.

Construction Industry

7. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect of material shortages and increasing land prices on the revival in the construction industry.

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction (Sir George Young): There is very little evidence at present of widespread or significant shortages of building materials or land. Construction output is now increasing and new work orders are 6 per cent. higher than they were a year ago.

Mr. Spellar: Is not that either an ill-informed or remarkably complacent reply? If the Minister talks to building companies—particularly those in the house-building sector—they will tell him that lead times for the delivery of bricks a month ago were 10 weeks, but are now 18 months. The brick mountain has gone, many of our brick companies have been mothballed and we are facing a severe crisis in building materials. Should not he and his Department be taking action to make sure that any upturn in the building industry is not constrained by major supply shortages?

Sir George Young: At the moment, there are 893 million bricks in stock—enough to build a 6 ft wall between London and China. I would be amazed if any shortage of bricks held up the recovery in the construction industry.

Sir Michael Neubert: Would not it be an extremely cost-effective contribution to the revival in the building and construction industry if greater attention were given to the declining and deteriorating condition of many hundreds of thousands of existing properties, and if greater priority were given to reversing that decline in those national assets?

Sir George Young: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There is a great deal of value for money to be obtained in making far better use of existing housing stock. The public sector has a role to play with improvement grants, but the prime responsibility for maintaining buildings in good condition must rest with the owner. Building societies and insurance companies have a common interest, and I should welcome any initiative launched by the house-building industry to generate interest on the part of home owners in maintaining their properties in better condition. As my hon. Friend has said, that will feed through to the building materials industry.

Mr. Henderson: Will not the right hon. Gentleman for once bury his newly acquired dogma—the dogma of the Government for 15 years—and be honest? The Government tell the building industry that they want to see it boosted. Is not the simple, sensible and obvious way to do that to release the £5.5 billion that councils have from the sale of their own assets to allow them to build badly needed homes, and to provide badly needed jobs for thousands of unemployed building workers?

Sir George Young: A recent survey of the building industry revealed that 94 per cent. of respondents believed that the construction market would be in a better condition in 12 months' time. For all of us in the House who are worried about unemployment, the good news is that more than 70 per cent. of firms expect to increase their staffing levels.

Mr. Allason: Is not one of the obstacles to the recovery of the construction business the length of time that it takes to get permission to start building? Is he aware of the difficulty that has been experienced by Paignton zoo in my constituency? It has put in an application for a review by the Department of the Environment, which will not be answered until September, although the original inspector's report was ready by April.

Sir George Young: I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning has taken steps to reduce the delay before a planning inquiry is set up and before a decision is announced. The response time is now falling. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister listened closely to the question from my hon. Friend, and that he will take it up.

Water and Sewerage Charges

8. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in his investigation of options to reduce water and sewerage charges in the south-west.

Mr. Gummer: The Director General of Water Services will announce limits on future price increases for all water and sewerage companies, including South West Water, on 28 July.

Mr. Tyler: Can the Secretary of State confirm or deny the frequent media reports that he has made a personal bid to get £100 million from the Exchequer to assist the water charge payers of the south-west? Can he also tell us whether it is true that he has been unsuccessful in that bid?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has a closer relationship with the press, which has made those comments, than perhaps the House is aware. The last time that I met him and his friends, a wholly fictitious report of our meeting reached the press before hand. We can take it that those other reports contain the same degree of truth as his original statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has been wandering around the west country telling people that if water charges were based on the council tax banding, those charges would fall? Would my right hon. Friend care to remind people that if council tax banding were used as the basis for water charges, the result would be a small reduction in the bills of some people while a great many other people would face increased charges? Does he agree that the Liberals would be better off supporting the efforts that the Government have been making in the European context to bring some real relief to the hard-pressed people of the west country?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is perfectly right, but then the Liberals have produced all kinds of statements of that sort. When they were pressed during the European elections to say how they would achieve the end that they had in view, they could produce no feasible scheme. The difference between the parties in the south-west is that the Conservatives are seeking to find an effective answer and the Liberals are trying to gain votes.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the Secretary of State aware that, since privatisation, water bills in the south-west have nearly doubled? Some pensioners in my constituency are now paying 10 per cent. of their income in water bills alone. When will he stop making pious promises and give some categorical assurances to the people of the south-west that help is on its way?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wait to hear the announcement by the Director General of Water Services—

Mr. Jamieson: I have been waiting for two years.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been waiting for two years because the 28 July date has been fixed for some time, and he should know that.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not join with the Liberals on this issue because he should realise that although considerable difficulties have been caused by the increase in the price of water in the south-west, the reason is that it has been necessary to improve the quality of the water and the infrastructure, which was left to run down under public ownership. The fact is that privatisation has made it possible to improve water services.

Mrs. Browning: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many single-person households believe that their water charges could be reduced with the installation of a meter? However, in the south-west, it costs £240 up front to have a meter installed—a prohibitive cost, especially when it is compared with the charge by Anglian Water of just £140. Will my right hon. Friend consider how difficult it is for such people to have a meter installed?

Mr. Gummer: I will certainly look at my hon. Friend's example. Anglian Water has a good reputation for the help that it has been giving. My hon. Friend will agree that, in seeking help for those with high water bills, the work that has been done by Conservative Members and the Government in the European Community has been exemplary. It would be helpful if we had a bit of support from Liberal Members.

Water Rates

10. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what percentage domestic water rates have changed in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement outlining the reasons for such changes.

Mr. Gummer: The average unmetered household bill for water and sewerage services in England and Wales has risen by 4.1., 6.5. and 6.2 per cent. respectively in real terms over the past three years. Those increases have been necessary to help pay for the massive programme of investment which the water industry is undertaking.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Secretary of State aware of the view in the water industry that much of that increase, which causes great hardship, is the result of improvements in standards that are not necessary for public health? Is that the case, and how does my right hon. Friend see prices moving over the next three years?

Mr. Gummer: On the movement of prices, the water regulator has made it clear that he hopes that the increase will be between 0 and 2 per cent. above inflation in the period approaching 2000. My hon. Friend will be pleased that that is significantly less than the figures that I have announced. Although we might disagree about standards in some areas, those being demanded in general are those that the people of Britain expect in order to have the quality of water and beaches that they want and the improvements in the sewerage arrangements that are necessary. Privatisation has made that possible and I support the standards set down by the European Union.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Is the Secretary of State aware that, in the five years since privatisation, charges have risen partly because profits have increased by £6.8 billion in all the water companies in England and Wales? That is more than double what the Director General of Water Services said was appropriate as recently as 1991. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that that enormous surplus profit is called back so that the investment is not charged over and over again to the domestic water consumer?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the hon. Lady will look carefully at what the water regulator will announce on 28 July. She will be able to follow the figures clearly. The water regulator will, quite properly, take those into account. The hon. Lady attacked the water companies, but since privatisation they have become one of Britain's most important sources of exports and investment. As one goes round the world, from America to Malaysia to Australia, one sees that British water companies are winning contracts throughout the world. The industry won hardly a contract when it was nationalised.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Can my right hon. Friend resolve the dichotomy between the calls from Liberal Democrat Members urging the Government to speed up the cleaning up of our beaches and water and their cries when they are on the doorsteps that we should reduce water bills?

Madam Speaker: Order. I have cautioned hon. Members time and again about asking questions that do not concern Government policy. Questions should not relate to other parties in the House. I hope that I shall not have to give further lectures on that matter. Will the Secretary of State attempt to answer the question?

Mr. Gummer: The Government's policy is to point out that if we are to have better standards, we must pay for them. That is the only possibility. The dichotomy is resolved by saying that. Those, like the Liberals, who have a different policy on each doorstep in order to win votes, never have to resolve a dichotomy.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Secretary of State will know, however, that the annual results of the 10 privatised water companies, published in the past couple of months, show, for just the year 1993-94, a collective profit of £1.6 billion. He will know that their dividends have in every case increased by between 7 and 9 per cent. He will know that the salaries of their senior executives have been increasing in the past three years by far more than a Railtrack signalman could possibly dream of, yet the customers—especially in the south-west, but also everywhere else in the country—are confronted by sharply escalating charges. When will the Government take action to ensure that the managers look after their customers, not their own share options, first and foremost?

Mr. Gummer: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wholly wrong in his attitude. The water companies are winning contracts and are providing a better service than has ever been provided before. Let me take as an example Anglian Water Services Ltd., which looks after most of my constituents. The number of complaints about that water company have plummeted since the privatisation took place. The hon. Gentleman does not live in the real world; he lives in the world of envy, which is the basis of socialism and his policies.

Housing Management

11. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his plans for the application of compulsory competitive tendering to housing management.

Sir George Young: The order extending compulsory competitive tendering to housing management came into force on 23 June. The first contracts are due to be in place on 1 April 1996.

Mr. Banks: May I express my full support for the introduction by my right hon. Friend of compulsory competitive tendering by local authorities in the management of their housing stock, in spite of the opposition from those on the Opposition Benches, given that that policy will benefit the tenants, in the better quality of the services that they will obtain, and the council tax payers, who will achieve a better deal for the money that they have to give to local authorities? Can my right hon. Friend give us any examples of the voluntary introduction of that policy by local authorities and the benefits that have accrued?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to summarise the objectives, which are to have a higher standard of management and a better quality of service. As to the economies that have already been secured from CCT, I was interested to see a survey, published today by the London borough of Wandsworth, analysing the five-year savings from competitive tendering—an average saving of 32 per cent. There are real benefits to be gained from that policy.

Mr. Gerrard: The Government estimate the preparatory costs of CCT in housing management at 10 per cent. of the contract, which is obviously a substantial amount of money. Can the Minister justify the requirement that that money be taken from housing revenue accounts, which means that existing tenants must pay for it from their rents?

Sir George Young: It is relatively easy to justify that. There is an initial up-front cost of 10 per cent., but there are average annual savings of 6 per cent, so the policy pays for itself in a very short time.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my right hon. Friend, who is visiting Macclesfield borough tomorrow to attend the opening of a development by the Templar Housing Society Ltd., of which I happen to be a member, accept that borough councils can be extremely efficient and responsible housing management services, and does he accept that it is not necessary for housing management to be put into the private sector for the tenants of public sector housing to have a first-class management service, as they have in Macclesfield borough?

Sir George Young: I am looking forward with mounting excitement to my visit to the north-west tomorrow. As to my hon. Friend's point, the efficient local authorities are perfectly able to put in for the contracts that are being advertised and if, as my hon. Friend says, they are efficient and competent, they have every prospect of winning that contract and going on to perform the services that they have performed so well.

Rents

12. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of rent being charged in the private and public residential sector.

Sir George Young: In 1993-94, in England, the average local authority rent was £33.70 per week, the average housing association rent for new assured lettings was £44.05 per week and the average rent for other private sector assured tenancies was £73 per week.

Mr. Winnick: Rachman would have been delighted to have been living now. He lived too soon. What possible justification can there be for council rents increasing at double the rate of inflation in the past 15 years and for council rents increasing by 6.5 per cent. on average this year? In such circumstances, is not it understandable that council tenants and private tenants working in the public and private sectors want justified wage increases, which is the reason for the current industrial dispute? Those people want a pay increase to compensate for the increase in rents.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman mouths the outdated prejudices of the 1960s. Many Labour-controlled local authorities have positive partnerships with the private rented sector and welcome the role that they can play in meeting housing need. The Government's policy on local authority rents is clear. They should reflect the value of properties. Our policy has been progressively to increase rents to those levels year by year.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, thanks to the right to buy, 1.5 million people have turned their rents into mortgages, a move opposed by Opposition Members? Will he also confirm that, thanks to the lowest mortgage rates in more than 20 years, those people will be paying far less in mortgage payments than they did in rent to local authorities?

Sir George Young: The figure mentioned by my hon. Friend is the figure for local authority tenants who are entitled to exercise their right under the rent-to-mortgage scheme. I hope that they will follow my hon. Friend's advice and exercise the right that the Government gave them in the teeth of opposition from Opposition Members.

Mr. Battle: Does the Minister recognise that the Government's calculated programme of promoting high rents across all sectors has caused the housing benefit system to break under the strain, and has led to the overcharging of council tenants and the pricing of people out of their homes? Will he confirm that he and his colleagues in the Department of Social Security oppose the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's cost-cutting review of housing benefit? Does not the Minister agree that the policy of high unemployment, low incomes and high rents will not work?

Sir George Young: The Government's policy is to move away from bricks and mortar subsidy towards personal subsidies. There are good reasons for that policy, which we have followed for a number of years. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that a fundamental review of income support is under way. The conclusions will be announced after they have been reached.

Energy Efficiency

13. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is planning to encourage greater energy efficiency.

Mr. Baldry: Our steps to encourage greater energy efficiency are clearly set out in the UK climate change programme and the UK strategy for sustainable development.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate the Government on placing such priority on energy efficiency. How much money are the Government giving in grants to the home energy efficiency scheme, bearing in mind the fact that it is designed to help the most vulnerable of our society—the disabled and the elderly?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to be able to tell the House that money being spent on the home energy efficiency scheme has almost doubled to £70 million. That extra money will provide grants for 200,000 extra homes this year. It will help them with energy efficiency measures, and will be positive action to help the most vulnerable.

Mrs. Ewing: Does not the Minister realise that the Government policy of imposing additional VAT on domestic fuel can hardly be viewed as one that promotes energy efficiency? Indeed, it will take away the right of ordinary people, particularly the disabled and the handicapped, to have decent heating in their houses. Areas such as the north of Scotland, which I represent, have a green energy policy. We achieve energy efficiency through hydro-electric power schemes. Does not he recognise that, far from actually promoting energy efficiency, he is promoting energy inefficiency?

Mr. Baldry: That is nonsense. Before we introduced VAT on energy, all the Opposition parties in different ways advocated introducing a tax on energy. The Liberal Democrats complained that it was an anomaly not to have VAT on domestic energy. Labour wanted an energy tax, as did other parties. It is monstrous that when those parties are confronted with the Government's courageous decision to introduce VAT on domestic fuel, they renege on their environmental commitments.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: What is happening to the Energy Savings Trust? The Minister will know that in this financial year and the next it was due to spend £175 million on energy efficiency, raised from a levy on the gas and electricity industries. Clare Spottiswoode, the Director General of Gas Supply, has said, however, that such a levy is illegal. Is the Department challenging that view, or is the trust set to collapse from a lack of funds?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to be able to tell the House that the Energy Savings Trust has made an excellent start. It has recruited a core of high-quality staff and run a number of successful pilot schemes. We are considering how best to secure the funding of the trust and its associated schemes.

Mr. Robathan: Although I welcome what the Minister has said, will he enter into conversations with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to ensure that the funding problem is resolved, because it appears that the new gas regulator is failing to implement Government policy?

Mr. Baldry: As I have told the House, we are considering how best to secure the funding of the Energy Savings Trust for the future. It is an excellent body; we are determined that it shall play its full part in promoting energy efficiency policies.

Public Sector Housing

14. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for public sector house building; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Local authorities and other public sector bodies completed 1,254 dwellings in 1993. Housing associations are now the main new source of subsidised housing: in 1993-94 they provided 56,500 homes with grant from central Government, and 8,334 homes with grant funded by local authorities.

Mr. O'Brien: That response shows just how pathetic is the Government's policy on providing affordable housing. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the organisations best placed to manage and provide affordable houses are local authorities, with my local authority of Wakefield in the lead? Does he accept that the Government's policy is wrong? Is he prepared to argue with his colleagues to change the direction of that policy and allow local authorities to provide more public, affordable housing for the people who need it?

Sir George Young: No, the policy is not wrong at all. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have provided about 25,000 more homes than we promised in our election manifesto three years ago.

Some local authorities may be the best managers of local authority stock; clearly, some of them are not. We get more homes for people in need by routing public money through housing associations than we do by routing it through local authorities. So there is a great deal of common sense behind the Government's policy of involving housing associations in providing the homes for rent that the country needs.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Labour-controlled Norwich city council is determined to maintain its traditional role as the main provider of rented housing in Norwich? Does he agree that that antediluvian, hidebound attitude does nothing to reduce the waiting list, now running at about 3,000 in Norwich? Would not it be better to encourage the council's co-operation with housing associations to solve some of the problems of Norwich in a sensible way?

Sir George Young: I very much hope that Norwich will do what many other local authorities, including Labour-controlled ones, are doing, and will route some of its capital through housing associations, simply because it will provide more homes in that way. No one can be in favour of a monopoly of social rented housing in any city. Many local authorities are encouraging positive partnerships with housing associations, to provide different management styles and types of homes. If any antediluvian authority still wants to go the whole distance on its own, it is way behind what many forward-looking local authorities of all parties are doing.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister accept that he has presided over a declining local authority house-building programme

year after year? Even with the houses built for rent by housing associations, there is a massive shortfall, leaving many people desperately in need of houses to rent. Earlier, the Minister said that 94 per cent. of builders believe that the situation will improve. That is hardly surprising, given that they do not believe that it can possibly get any worse. Why does not the Minister get builders back to work and use councils' capital receipts, and do it now?

Sir George Young: Builders are getting back to work. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the recently published statistics he will see that they show rising output in the construction industry, more private sector house building starts, more housing association house building starts and growing activity. The key statistic for those in housing need is the number of new lettings and the fact that the figure for 1992-93 was 321,000 compared with 312,000 in 1979-80. That is the currency which matters for those on the waiting list.

Dr. Spink: In view of the previous question, will my right hon. Friend confirm that there are now 2.4 million more homes in Britain than there were in 1979 as a result of the low inflation and low interest rates that the Government are pursuing and now achieving, and will he continue to encourage his right hon. Friends in that pursuit?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the housing stock has risen faster than the population and that the prospects for a recovery in the house building market are now very good, with house prices affordable, confidence returning to the housing market and land with planning permission readily available. I hope that the confidence that we have begun to see emerging during the past few months will carry forward during the next months and years.

Guildford and Woolwich Bombings

3.30 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It will be within your recollection that, on 19 October 1989, the Home Secretary came to the House to announce the setting up of a judicial inquiry into the Guildford and Woolwich convictions under a former High Court judge, Sir John May. Tomorrow, four years and eight months later, Sir John May is due to report. In stark contrast to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry, much of Sir John's inquiry has been conducted in private, and it is difficult to discover any details about the publication of its report tomorrow.

My purpose is to ask whether it would be possible for you, Madam Speaker, to persuade the Home Office to arrange for a statement to be made in the House tomorrow on the results of that judicial inquiry so that we may question its outcome, or, failing that, to be a little more open with the details of where and when the report will be published.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman credits me with greater powers of persuasion than I actually have as well as a very good memory. I am sorry that I cannot take the matter further than that.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have just listened to your ruling that you cannot take further the question of a statement, but you will be well aware of the practice by which it appears that Ministers persuade individual Members to put down questions for answer at short notice. I believe that on today's Order Paper there about 10 questions which were tabled yesterday for answer today. Is it possible for you at least to draw that practice to the attention of the House so that it can be used today in order that we can discover whether the report of the inquiry will be published by means of a written answer or given in a statement?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should make inquiries at the Table Office. That is not a point of order for me at this stage.

BILL PRESENTED

European Union (Accessions)

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary MacGregor, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mrs. Gillian Shephard and Mr. Heathcoat-Amory, presented a Bill to amend the definition of "the Treaties" and "the Community Treaties" in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 so as to include the treaty concerning the accession of the Kingdom of Norway, the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden to the European Union; and to approve that treaty for the purposes of section 6 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 138.]

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not inconsistent, in line with the opinion poll that has just been released showing that 67 per cent. of Conservative Members of Parliament are against a single currency, for us to find that, contrary— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall determine whether that is a point of order. Most points of order put to me are totally bogus and many points of order from hon. Members who are now complaining are equally bogus. I know a bogus point of order when I hear one and there is one coming my way. I am ready to answer the hon. Gentleman, but I am such a courteous Speaker that I do not want to interrupt him. Will the hon. Gentleman now come to the point of order that is for me and leave out the percentages and the political arguments?

Mr. Cash: I endorse your view on these matters, Madam Speaker. I simply say that the House of Commons has recently enacted a Bill which states that we shall decide in due course whether we are to move towards economic and monetary union and a single currency. In a speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that he wishes—

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me help the hon. Gentleman. I gave him his chance, and I know exactly what he is getting at. If the hon. Gentleman reads the Order Paper carefully, he will see precisely what the Bill is and is not about.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The Bill is about the potential accession of various other countries to the European Community. If there is to be monetary union, that then is a European state. We need to know whether or not the Government are in favour of that.

Madam Speaker: The Bill is not about European currency. It is about the accession of members to the European Union. I am surprised that the hon. Members who raised the matter are not aware of that.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is this another bogus point of order coming my way?

Mr. Faulds: It is absolutely genuine, Madam Speaker —as are all my points of order. May I simply congratulate you on your toughness?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has seen nothing yet.

Regulation of Diet Industry

3.35 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the diet industry; to bring all medicines relating to diets under control; and for connected purposes.

The Bill that I seek leave to introduce would make provision to regulate the diet industry and to bring weight loss pills, potions and patches under the Medicines Acts. Such a Bill is long overdue. At present, the diet industry can claim virtually anything for its products. When they do not work, the consumer blames herself—it is usually women who buy such products—and moves on to try the next product.

Leading health professionals in this country, America and Canada agree that dieting is not good for our health. It has been widely established that diets do not work. Ninety-five per cent. of dieters regain all the weight lost within two or three years.

Another purpose of the Bill is to reinforce and support the aims of Dietbreakers—an excellent organisation founded by Mary Evans Young, which challenges the perils and futility of dieting except for medical reasons, such as diabetes and other diagnosed illnesses. Dietbreakers opposes the tyranny of thinness. I am glad to say that the movement is growing and has taken on an international dimension. No Diet Day on 5 May was celebrated by men and women, but mainly women and girls, from Helsinki to New York. They are saying loud and clear that they have had enough of the ill-health and misery peddled by the diet industry.

Ninety per cent. of British women diet at some time during their lives. At any given time, 50 per cent. of women are dieting, including girls as young as eight and women as old as 75. There is also growing evidence that men and boys are being targeted by the diet industry. Dietbreakers points out, and I agree, that dieting undermines women's emotional and physical well-being and is often a step towards serious eating disorders.

The fashion industry and the image-makers place enormous pressures on people, and on women and girls in particular, to be unhealthily thin. They imply that, unless we can get into a size 10 or 12 dress, we are no longer attractive. It is a tragedy that those powerful image-makers are encouraging western women and girls to starve through dieting when so many people are dying from starvation in many parts of the developing world.

I believe that the regulations that I propose are eminently sensible. All weight loss centres should prominently display a health warning that rapid weight loss is dangerous to health. All weight loss companies should provide consumers with a card that clearly outlines the benefits and risks of any weight loss. They should also disclose additional charges. Too often the consumer buys a product and then discovers that she must incur extra charges when a programme has been devised. All diets and weight loss pills, potions and patches should be brought under the Medicines Acts.

All products—including books, tapes and videos—should clearly state the risks of rapid weight loss and that permanent weight loss is unlikely and cannot be guaranteed. Consumers should be informed of the estimated or actual duration of the recommended programme.

Weight loss centres should do what is now being done in America, which is to display posters on their premises carrying the warnings, "Rapid weight loss may cause serious health problems", "Only lifestyle changes such as making healthy food choices and exercising are likely to promote any long-term weight loss" and "People should consult a doctor before starting a weight loss programme." Consumers should have the right to ask about the qualifications of people promoting weight loss programmes.

The potential damage of rapid weight loss is a serious health issue. It is not a trivial matter. At the extreme end, it can lead to the sad and haunting pictures that we saw recently in the press of the surviving twin, Samantha Kendall, whose sister Michaela died from anorexia. Until Samantha went to Canada, where she is now happily responding to treatment, she starved herself almost to the point of death. She weighed just 4 stone. It was a terrible tragedy that started with dieting. As two happy, plump, 14-year-old teenagers, they decided that they needed to lose some weight. It resulted in the death of one and the near-death of the other.

If it is argued, as it was yesterday on another ten-minute Bill, that regulations could cost industry profits—the Conservative party is averse to regulations—the Government should study the statistics for people being treated on the national health service for anorexia, bulimia and other diet-related diseases. Although the prime cost is in human misery, if the argument is to be one of economics, what about the cost to the NHS? It far outweighs anything else.

Dieting causes other illnesses. I have spoken about the extremes, but it also causes constipation, headaches, gallstones and depression. It brings on mood swings and causes infertility in some women, but most of all it causes a loss of self-esteem.

I want to mention a few of the more outrageous claims made by those who are exploiting people who have been led to believe that they are not attractive because they do not fit into a size 10 or 12. In the book "You Don't Have to Diet", Dr. Tom Sanders of King's college and Peter Barzalgette expose a few of the greater excesses of the diet industry. They say:

"As the cult of thinness has gradually perverted our view of our bodies, so a huge range of misleading and even fraudulent products has emerged to exploit the situation. These pills, potions and magic cures do not help you to lose body fat."

I shall give a few examples of points made in the book. It warns about appetite suppressants, which are common in the diet industry. In the long run they do not work, but, even more important, they can be very harmful. Bulking agents are pills taken before meals to feel fuller. They often cause wind and other uncomfortable feelings in the stomach. Even worse, they can lead to a blockage of the intestines.

There are creams that are supposed to dissolve cellulite, whatever that is—I think that it is the diet industry's word for fat. One such cream, Fadeaway, claims that all one needs to do is to rub the cream into the skin and the fat will disappear. I hope that no one is conned into paying a great deal of money for that. It is described as vanishing cream, but it does not work.

One of my favourites is what Mary Evans Young of Dietbreakers calls the Chinese connection. Dr. Stephen Chang claims that his weight loss remedy emerges from 6,000 years of study of alternative medicines and that all

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

one has to do is to lie on one's back, rub the tummy and the fat will disappear. Do not try it; it does not work. It is possibly one of the daftest programmes and it is certainly not the cheapest. There are also various drugs that stimulate the metabolic rate. All the drugs have unpleasant side effects.

Laxatives, which are widely promoted, can be very dangerous, and some have been banned. Any weight loss resulting from the use of diuretics or water loss pills is temporary, and such use could be dangerous. The latest fad is slimming patches: people are instructed to attach a seaweed preparation to their skins. It is claimed that the preparation passes from the patch into the body and speeds up the metabolism so that calories are burned faster. That is absolute rubbish—and, even worse, the American Food and Drug Administration believes that the preparation may act adversely on the thyroid gland, and has banned its use.

Then there are the books. Judith Wills has published one entitled "Size 12 in 21 Days". That is a positive lie: the average woman would never be able to drop two dress sizes in three weeks without seriously affecting her health. Why do people like Judith Wills and Rosemary Conley keep producing new books if they have found the perfect solution to weight problems, as they frequently claim? The truth is that they have not found it; like the rest of the diet industry, they are simply out to make money.

Too many people are suffering at the hands of the pill pedlars and jack-the-lads selling seaweed patches and other such nonsense. I want to stop it, and that is why I am presenting my Bill.

3.45 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): In rising to oppose the Bill, I have no personal interest to declare. I am not sponsored by any food or diet company, nor have I ever been on a diet; indeed, I suspect that—like you, Madam Speaker—I am a little underweight. Sadly, however, that is not the case for just under 50 per cent. of all adults in the country.

While no one would disagree with the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that claims made by the distributors of some patent slimming drugs and pads are false, the problem is already being addressed. The Advertising Standards Authority has recently begun a campaign to prevent such advertising by the media, and—as I shall attempt to explain later—the diet industry is working closely with the European Commission to establish safe and effective guidelines for slimming products.

Newspapers have a duty of care as well, however, and they should exercise greater responsibility. The Mirror Group has been singled out by the Advertising Standards Authority for accepting some advertisements for medicines that are in flagrant breach of the code. In naming that bastion of socialism, I hope that members of its advertising department will exercise higher standards in the future, matching those of their editorial colleagues.

My objection to the Bill is this. The long title makes it clear that it seeks to restrict bona fide slimming products: the net effect of that would be detrimental to the health of the nation, as well as imposing a wholly unnecessary burden on industry. The hon. Member for Halifax believes that we should introduce costly and cumbersome new regulations to prevent 18 million adults from taking responsible steps to improve their own health. As I have said, nearly 50 per cent. of adults in the country are overweight, and one in seven—nearly 6 million people—are so fat that their health is in danger. It is getting worse: throughout the 1980s, the number of women suffering from clinical obesity shot up by some 50 per cent.

The hon. Lady spoke of illnesses caused by dieting, but it is well known that being fat—or, in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), pleasantly padded—puts people at risk of heart disease, strokes, diabetes, various cancers, infertility, respiratory problems, painful joints and other illnesses. The list goes on and on.

We can gain some idea of the cost to the national health service. In Sweden, where the prevalence of this problem is not dissimilar to that in the United Kingdom, 15 per cent. of the entire health budget is spent on treating the effects of overweight and obesity. The consequences of being overweight and obese are among the most serious public health issues that face us today.

The suggestion that we should simply hand the problem over to doctors is absurd; how exactly does the hon. Member for Halifax imagine that the 27,000 general practitioners in this country will be able to regulate products and services that are needed by 18 million people? Even if they concentrated only on the medically obese, GPs would have to see more than 40 extra patients every day. That could not be left to the dietitians, because there are only 3,300 in the whole United Kingdom.

On the other hand, there are 10,000 slimming club leaders and diet counsellors, most of whom are women, who perform a valuable service to the community, providing regular advice and contact that is helpful to those who need to lose weight. GPs cannot possibly be expected to have time for that.

There is no medical reason why people should be forbidden free access to proven safe and successful methods of self-help. Diet products are not only safe, but are often extremely successful. Meal replacement diets, for example, are backed by a wealth of clinical evidence showing that many thousands of people have lost weight and have learnt how to stay slimmer and much healthier, many without the costly burden of medical supervision.

The manufacturers represented by the Infant and Dietetic Foods Association's slimming foods working group are now working closely with the European Commission to establish high standards of quality and safety. Yet that is the industry that the hon. Member for Halifax says is literally "getting away with murder". She should think carefully before using such emotive language. She must understand that if we allow the weight of the nation to spiral upwards unchecked, more and more deaths are inevitable, along with pain and disability for millions, much of it preventable.

If the hon. Member for Halifax believes that it is the diet industry that is

"dictating that all women have to conform to a certain body shape",

I imagine that she must be completely unaware that the diet industry is already subject to strict controls on advertising and is simply not permitted to use idealised over-thin images to promote its products. The only body shapes to which the responsible diet industry encourages women to conform are those that are healthy and comfortable for each individual.

Nobody should feel pressurised for being fat, but everybody has the right to take control of his or her own

health and to have full information and access to all available safe methods of doing so. The Government are not about to remove the freedom of the individual.

Supporters of the Bill should be careful that they do not become involved in sizeism in reverse. If people are heavily overweight, of course it is right that they should be persuaded to lose weight, just as heavy smokers should be persuaded to cut down, because for many that will mean escape from a painful and disabled old age, and possibly an early death.

Everyone is horrified by the apparent increase in eating disorders, but the hon. Member for Halifax clearly does not understand that the abnormal eating behaviours of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are symptoms—outward expressions of deep and serious psychological disorders. Any clinical reference manual will explain that clearly. She must be clear in her mind that the difference between dieting and eating disorders is profound. One is a necessary undertaking for nearly half the population; the others are symptoms of deep psychological disturbance.

It is trite and irresponsible to believe that complex psychological disorders can be cured by restricting products from which no one is in danger. By holding up the industry as a scapegoat, and thereby ignoring the need to look for the real causes, we should not only jeopardise the health and well-being of almost half the population, but also do the small but tragic minority who suffer from anorexia and bulimia a huge and desperate disservice.

We are a Government of deregulation, so what possible value can there be in introducing costly and cumbersome burdens and regulations that have no medical basis whatever, would be unenforceable and would put an unnecessary and impossible burden on GPs? I beg to oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Tony Banks, Ms Diane Abbott, Ms Liz Lynne, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Ms Harriet Harman, Ms Clare Short and Mr. Ken Livingstone.

REGULATION OF DIET INDUSTRY

Mrs. Alice Mahon accordingly presented a Bill to regulate the diet industry; to bring all medicines relating to diets under control; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 July, and to be printed. [Bill 139.]

Opposition Day

[15TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Housing and Urban Policies

Madam Speaker: I must first tell the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Secondly, because of the interest in the debate, I have had to limit speeches to 10 minutes between 6 pm and 8 pm.

3.54 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the failure of the Government's housing and urban policies for England; notes that they have too frequently been characterised by contradictory objectives and doctrinaire solutions which have resulted in cuts in main programmes more than cancelling out the benefits of specifically targeted funds, the waste of millions of pounds as those in need are forced into the private sector at higher cost and in worse conditions than could have been available in local authority houses, the undermining of voluntary action and community identity, the reinforcement of a dependency culture and of unbalanced communities as rents are forced up and economically active people are trapped on benefit, unacceptable levels of homelessness, houses in disrepair, and mortgage arrears and repossession; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to abandon its ideological blinkers, to develop a new partnership with local authorities, the private sector and community groups, to allow the phased release of capital receipts, and to secure effective co-ordination of all Government main and specific programmes so as to improve England's urban communities, and the affordability and availability of housing across the country.

Last week, the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction published a major report on the impact of urban policy. There was no fanfare for its publication, no stage-managed press conference and no glossy summary of the kind so often adopted by Ministers. In their place, there was just a planted parliamentary question which gave no insight into the report's findings or conclusions, but instead sought to claim that the report's recommendations had been addressed by the "major reforms" that the Secretary of State for the Environment had announced to the House in November 1993.

The report does not even have the customary statement of introduction giving such basic details as when the report was commissioned, when it was first delivered to Ministers and how many months it had taken Ministers to decide what to do with it. We know the reasons why. The party of open government received the report more than 18 months ago and since that time, because of the embarrassment of its conclusions, Ministers have been working out what to do with it and how to ensure that it never saw the light of day. When the Minister replies, perhaps he will explain why the report was delayed.

The Minister might explain something else as well—the extraordinary choice, perhaps the Freudian choice, of photographs on the front page. The first photograph shows a waterside development. The other photograph is extraordinary and revealing: it shows the inside of a betting shop. Nothing more symbolises the Government's lottery and casino policy. Of all the pictures to select to characterise and symbolise inner-city policy, the Government chose a picture of the inside of a betting shop.

We should not be surprised by the delay and by Ministers' attempts to suppress the report. Nor should we

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be surprised by the deliberate and selective leaking of parts of the report, such as the article in *The Independent*, under the headline

"£10 billion wasted on failed inner city policy."

The leaks were designed to give an impression different from the conclusions of the report.

The report is the single most thorough and comprehensive study of urban policy ever undertaken. Far from telling Ministers and Conservative central office what they wanted to hear, it blows apart the doctrinaire, market-driven ideology of the Conservative party. It exposes the short-term incoherence of much of the Government's approach and it shows the importance of sensible public spending in building the economic and social base of urban areas. It highlights the neglected but vital role that local elected councillors have to play.

The report first addresses the issue of coherence and of whether there has been any consistent strategy which has linked, in some logical way, the myriad programmes, initiatives, gimmicks, wheezes and, yes, pilot projects—which we heard about in Question Time—which have characterised urban policy and Ministers' key public spending decisions in main programmes. The report says:

"There is widespread evidence that policy has lacked the coherence that could have come through a more strategic approach to regeneration . . . There has been a shifting target, a shifting set of priorities and a growing and fluctuating set of policies to tackle urban problems."

It can say that again.

Perhaps most disturbing of all to the dogmatists of the Conservative party, the report wholly rubbishes the view that spending billions of pounds of public money, such as the £2 billion spent in docklands on putting up vast office blocks like Canary wharf, would lead to benefits trickling down to local people, as bankers had their cars valeted by hoi polloi and bought their fags in the local sweet shop.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

The report says:

"Our work reinforces the view that 'trickle down' has not generally been very effective".

Mr. Riddick: If urban renewal in inner cities is so important, will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why there is no mention of it in the document "Change and National Renewal"? Perhaps while he is about it, and because he is the campaign manager, could he explain why we have not heard one solitary word spoken in the House of Commons over the past six weeks by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman can always be relied on to ask the most absurd questions. *[Interruption.]* As soon as the Government bring forward the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill from the wreckage which has been heaped on both of them in the House of Lords, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield will have a great deal to say in this House, as he has outside.

Let me continue to deal with the report's conclusions because I know that the reason why Conservative Members have sought to suppress it and the reason why they are now asking irrelevant questions about it is that they do not want to hear what the report says about their policies.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in moment to the hon. Gentleman.

The report shows that there is no coherence in Government policy—a dogma which has not been delivered. There are, however, some areas of this Administration's record which have, of course, been consistent. First, there has been a consistent belief that public spending almost automatically crowds out other economic activity. Secondly, there has been a profound, coruscating hostility to local government which has got worse as the Conservatives' local government base has shrunk. Both those beliefs are seriously challenged by the report.

The report also shows that, generally, additional public spending has acted positively to bring down unemployment and to improve economic activity and socio-economic conditions.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I want to deal with this section of the report first and then, of course, I shall take interventions from both hon. Gentlemen.

There were, the report says, positive relationships between public spending and employment, economic activity and socio-economic conditions. It says:

"public resources appear to have made an impact on turning around aspects both of the economic and residential distress in urban areas".

However, the authors go on to seek to explain how, in the most deprived areas, especially in conurbation cores and areas of high unemployment, policy has not been able to make significant inroads into socio-economic problems. Why? The answer that the report's authors give is very simple and it confirms what Labour has said for so long:

"Most local authorities have experienced real or relative reductions in both HIP and RSG finance during the decade."

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I have already said that I shall give way to the hon. Members for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) in a moment.

The report continues:

"allowing for inflation, RSG and HIP declined by over one third between 1979-80 and 1989-90 in five authorities of Tyne and Wear".

The experience of other areas, I may add, has been exactly the same. The report concludes:

"The recurring complaints of financial 'cuts' by many of the big cities are therefore difficult to refute".

Mr. Richards: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because he is obviously very nervous. Would the—*[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is not a sponsor of the motion on which he is speaking? Is it because the hon. Member for Sedgefield does not support the motion, or is it because the hon. Member for Sedgefield does not have a view on this issue, any more than he has a view on any other important issue? Is not it yet another example of more blur from Blair?

Mr. Straw: As a distinguished former chairman of the Conservative party said to me the other day, the quality of researchers in Conservative central office is now very poor

and the quality of its mouthpieces in the House is even poorer. We have just had a good example of that. You know, Madam Speaker, as we know, that there are three hon. Members—

Mr. Heald *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I have given two hon. Members chances and I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman now, unless hon. Members can promise that they will address themselves to the report. Madam Speaker has already made it clear that there is a great deal of interest in the report among hon. Members on both sides—perhaps—of the House who have something serious to say. Three of my hon. Friends wish to make their maiden speeches and I do not want their time wasted by numerous interventions from Conservative Members.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman is arguing that investment has declined and that that is wrong. Is he making a commitment, on behalf of his party, that there would be higher public spending under Labour? If so, how much? Where is the beef? It is all very well to criticise, but we need to know what he would do.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman makes a good intervention. I commend him for working it out himself, rather than relying on the central office brief. I shall answer his questions during my speech. We are concerned about using resources which are already there and using existing public spending in a different and better way. If the hon. Gentleman stays where he is, all will be revealed.

I said that the report confirmed our view about the role of public spending. It also deals with our belief about the importance of local authorities. Over the past 15 years, more than 144 separate Acts of Parliament have been passed, each one further removing the powers of competence of local authorities. The report records the widespread view of the experts whom its authors interviewed that

"much of government policy had reduced the capacity of local authorities to be successful partners in a variety of ways".

It went on to lament that a major

"loss of autonomy was in the area of capital controls, in particular the restriction in the use of capital receipts from council house sales".

Fifteen years ago, the Conservative party controlled more than half the London boroughs, many of the metropolitan boroughs and by far the largest number of shire districts, including large towns and cities. But as electors have increasingly rejected the Conservatives as a party that could be trusted to run our towns and city halls, Conservative central government has become less and less attached to the realities of urban government and increasingly has had to act like a colonial administration, imposing its will and bypassing those with a local democratic mandate.

It is that which lies at the root of the incoherence of Government urban policy which is so amply spelt out in the report—that and a continuing arrogance that Ministers always know best. What they should have done instead is to listen first, accept advice and then act; and that—partly to answer the question of the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North—is exactly what the Labour party is doing. Under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), a full-scale inquiry into urban policy, City 2020, is currently under way. My hon. Friend will speak later in more detail on urban policy.

We have been following much the same approach with regard to housing policy with a major nationwide inquiry, Secure Homes 2000, which is being chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). In stark contrast to the sham consultation of the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction in his review of homeless policy, our inquiry is listening to what people have to say before reaching conclusions.

I shall revert to the report. To all its criticisms, the Minister says that the recommendations "have been addressed", not least by the introduction of a single regeneration budget and the establishment of single regional government offices. We hope that those new arrangements work. However, we have serious misgivings about the way in which the single regeneration budget may operate. I have four points to make on that.

First, the basic schism between the Department of the Environment and the Department of Trade and Industry has not been resolved; rather, it is bound into the bidding guidance itself. Secondly, there is a lack of clear criteria which has attracted a multiplicity of bids. I understand that there are 75 bids in the north-west alone. How will they be handled? Thirdly, there is no evidence of a change of approach from the Government, so we have the absurd situation where elected local councils must compete in the bidding process with unelected, unaccountable and often self-appointed quangos and agencies.

Lastly, there is the question of cash. The simple truth is that the single regeneration budget masks a reduction in the resources available to urban areas. According to the annual report of the Department of the Environment, the amount of resources will drop by more than £100 million between this year and 1996-97. The new arrangements will not inspire confidence if they are simply a smokescreen for further cuts. Indeed, there is so little free new money that the 75 bids in the north-west are fighting this year for a share of a paltry £13 million to £14 million of new money.

One of the many problems which the authors of the report faced was to discern the real objectives of the Government's urban policy. How people are housed, in what conditions and at what price is central to the health of all communities, urban, suburban, and rural.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

Yet the authors would have had a similar difficulty in defining the objectives of Government housing policy, as they did on urban policy overall.

The objective of housing policy for any Government from whatever party should be to ensure that everyone has the choice of a decent home at a reasonable price. There should be a real choice of tenure, and in conditions which encourage labour mobility and avoid benefit dependency at the lowest sensible cost to the public purse. Against those tests, the Government's policies have plainly failed.

Yes, more people are now owner-occupiers than was the case 15 years ago. To the extent that that has occurred as a result of free choice by people, it is to be welcomed. But we all know that, for many, that has not been the case. The organised collapse of local authority housebuilding and the institution of a policy of high rents have meant that many thousands of people have been forced to buy and are now trapped in homes which are worth much less than they paid

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for them and which they cannot in practice sell. Thousands more face mounting arrears and the prospect of repossession.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does the hon. Gentleman think that local authorities should be able to spend more or all of their capital receipts? If the answer is yes, does he think that that will add to the public sector borrowing requirement, or will it make no difference to public borrowing?

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): What a brilliant chap he is.

Mr. Straw: We now understand why, yet again, the Conservatives got tanked in Amber Valley at the local elections. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, what a brilliant chap the hon. Gentleman is. Our policy on spending capital receipts is exactly the same policy as that of the Government between November 1992 and December 1993, with the same consequences.

In a speech 12 days ago—

Mr. Oppenheim: Answer.

Mr. Straw: I have just answered. The hon. Gentleman may not like the answer, but I have answered the question.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. In a speech 12 days ago—

Mr. Oppenheim: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I repeat the question, as obviously the hon. Gentleman did not hear it? Will it add to the PSBR or not?

Madam Speaker: I am no more responsible for comments from the Opposition Front Bench than I am for comments from the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Straw: I repeat my advice to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). Only one hon. Member who has intervened so far has been wise enough to take it. Given the appalling quality of research at central office these days, Members should not even bother to read briefs, let alone ask questions from them. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I have answered the question, and I will give many more answers in my speech.

In a speech 12 days ago to the Chartered Institute of Housing notable only for its complacency—*[Interruption.]* Well, I was saving this for later but I shall raise it now. Our view is that capital receipts should be made available on a phased basis to local authorities to spend. Our belief is that

"There is simply no excuse for authorities not using those receipts in view of the needs"—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1983; Vol. 45, c. 234.]

That was the view of the then Minister for Housing in July 1983, and it is for the current Minister of Housing to explain now why the Government's policy has changed—particularly because, although the Government's policy has changed, the Minister making that statement has not changed. It is exactly the same Minister who 11 years ago said that capital receipts ought to be spent who is now saying that they should not.

I wish to go on with my speech, and I hope that it will be noted by the Chair, as well as by my hon. Friends, how much time-wasting Government Members have tried to achieve.

In a speech 12 days ago to the Chartered Institute of Housing notable only for its complacency and overpowering self-congratulation, the Minister for Housing claimed that among many other achievements which the Government could be "proud of" were the latest data on mortgage arrears suggesting that

"there had been a sharp decline in the number of repossessions".

That only serves to emphasise the extraordinary myopia of the Ministers. The "Roof" report, on which the Minister relied for his assertion of pride, spelled out that, despite a recent fall in total numbers, that still left

"well over half a million households unable to pay all of their mortgages";

and the report stated that repossessions were still at

"record levels compared to previous housing recoveries".

Indeed, arrears are running at five times the level of 1984, and repossessions at four times the level.

It is this Minister, apparently so proud of his record, who is still presiding over the human tragedy of 800 families every week losing their homes because they cannot afford to pay their mortgages—in almost all cases through no fault of their own. That is a matter not for pride but for shame.

The Minister has evidently not read his own Department's housing research summary, which showed that one fifth of mortgage holders were experiencing problems with loan repayments. Aside from the Government's appalling record on arrears and repossessions, the Minister's speech to the Institute of Housing was remarkable for something else—his failure at any stage in his half-hour address to devote even a single sentence to the single most important, most damaging and most wasteful aspect of the Government's housing policy. He did not mention their policy of deliberately forcing up rents of local authority and housing association tenants at a rate many times that of inflation, while providing a virtually unlimited subsidy from the public purse to landlords of private sector tenants.

The present Administration have never disguised their hostility to council tenants. Throughout the 1980s, they forced councils to raise rents way above the level of inflation. Since the new housing financial regime was introduced in 1990, Ministers have set about securing rent increases that are nothing short of extortionate.

Since 1990, average council rents have risen from £20 a week in 1989 to £33 in 1993. The increase required this year, at 7 per cent., is three times the prevailing level of inflation. Some local authorities, almost all Conservative, have increased their rents even more. In the Minister's borough of Ealing, the average rent is now touching £60 per week—almost twice the average council rent—as a consequence of a deliberate policy. That is one more reason of many why the electors of Ealing so decisively rejected the Conservatives at the polls just eight weeks ago.

I shall return to the social and economic consequences of the Government's policy, which are bad enough, in a moment, but even worse is the increase in rents of housing association tenants. The average rent for such tenants is now £38 per week, but new tenants are being given so-called assured tenancies and they are charged much more. The Minister cited an average rent of £44 a week, but, typically, tenants may be paying £60 or more. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced evidence today to show that, in many cases, the assured rents being paid by housing association tenants are greater than the market rent they could pay in the free market.

The private rented sector, where rents have been effectively deregulated since 1989, is a similar story. The average private rent was already running at roughly twice that charged in the social housing sector. Despite that, private rents have risen by more than 44 per cent. in three years. As we heard from the Minister, the average local authority rent stands at £33.70, but the average publicly supported private sector rent, £73, is more than double that.

The high rent policy has had the most appalling consequences, which have undermined the prosperity and cohesion of the very communities in urban areas that the Government claim they wish to help. Council house rents are now so high that the Government are deliberately making a profit out of those 1.4 million tenants who still pay a full rent. By 1996-97, that profit is due to reach a staggering £600 million. Not a penny of it will go back to the tenants in terms of better repairs or in new homes for their sons and daughters and their children. No, that profit is used, in the chilling words of the Department of the Environment's annual report, "to offset" the cost of housing benefit in a new form of double taxation.

We have the outrageous situation in which council tenants in work or on retirement pensions, with incomes above housing benefit level but way below average incomes, will, by 1996-97, be paying on average an extra tax of £10 a week towards the housing benefit of those even less well off than they are. No wonder no one, but no one, any longer believes that the Conservative party is the party of either low or fair taxation. How can an extra tax of £10 a week on council tenants in work be justified? They will be forced to pay what no one else will be paying—an extra £10 towards the social security costs of those who earn just a little less than them.

In housing associations, the excessively high rents paid by tenants are used in a different, but no more acceptable, way to pay for the reduction in grant which the Government have forced on the associations. It has fallen from 87 per cent. in 1988-89 to 62 per cent. this year, and it may be as low as 55 per cent. next year or the year after.

About 1.8 million council and housing association tenants still pay a full rent. They either do not want to or cannot buy a house, or they want to stay where they have always lived, to exercise the choice which the Government say is theirs. Those spiralling rents are increasingly turning the once balanced communities of council and housing association estates into welfare ghettoes, where almost every new tenant is on benefit. As existing tenants become unemployed, the housing benefit system makes it nigh impossible for them ever to escape their dependency on welfare.

On Monday, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury made a speech in Spain claiming that in Britain

"the family was weakened by welfare".

What he should have spelt out is how his Government's policy has deliberately increased the number of people trapped on welfare—people with no realistic chance of a job that can provide them with a family income even of the basic level which they get on benefit—and that one of the principal causes of that welfare dependency is the Government's policy of high rents.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, because I want to get on and other hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to speak.

The average family must earn £270 a week just to be no worse off than on benefit. A recent estimate suggests that every £10 increase in rent pushes up the edge of the poverty trap by between £25 and £70. Tory Members should deal with those issues if they are concerned about the spiralling cost of housing benefit.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Am I to understand that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) does not intend to give way?

Mr. Straw: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: In that case, hon. Members must resume their seats and not persist.

Mr. Straw: I have allowed six interventions by Tory Members and only one was worth while.

Those in part-time work on family credit face the ludicrous situation that, for every extra pound that they earn, 80p may typically be clawed back and, at the extreme end, 97p is clawed back, principally through loss of housing benefit. Where is the incentive in that?

Last year, the Select Committee drew attention to that problem. The National Federation of Housing Associations has estimated that, if grant rates are cut to 55 per cent. and rents rise accordingly, 85 per cent. of tenants will be eligible for housing benefit. In the council sector 15 years ago, just 18 per cent. of tenants were on benefit. Now the figure is 64 per cent. and rising inexorably every year.

In the private rented sector, rents are so high that only those eligible for benefit can even contemplate taking on a tenancy. Moreover, those tenants are much more likely to suffer poor physical conditions, or harassment from their landlord. The increase in the size of the private rented sector was another source of "pride" for the Minister in his speech to the Institute of Housing. His figures were wrong for a start.

He claimed, with typical error, that the sector had risen from

"around 7 per cent. of total housing stock to just under 10 per cent."

But his Department's figures show a different and much more modest result—from 9 per cent. in 1989 to 10.2 per cent. in December 1993. No one of the statisticians in the Library has any idea where the figures come from. I have the Department's figures, which say what I have just said, not what he said. The only explanation that we can come up with is that, typically, the Government have confused the figures for Wales in 1989 with those for England in 1993.

On the issue of the private rented sector, we see the greatest collision between blind dogma on the one hand, and common sense, housing needs and the saving of public money on the other.

We accept the need for a role for the private rented sector, as I made clear in a speech to the Association of Residential Letting Agents earlier this year, but we do not accept the role which the Government have created for it. Any expansion in private renting has come about exclusively off the back of the public purse. The sector may be privately run but it is publicly subsidised. There is certainly no free market. The Government have deregulated rents, ended security and forced local authorities to pay almost any rent which landlords demand.

[Mr. Straw]

We are therefore faced with a stunning contradiction: allegedly one of the most free enterprise parts of the economy has become one of the most dependent on the state. Private landlords are now fast overtaking farmers as the recipients of the largest amount of state handouts. If Her Majesty's Government want to do something about people who sponge off the state, it is to private landlords, not to the homeless or the beggars, that they should direct their attention.

As a result of increasing rents, housing benefit costs have rocketed, and nowhere faster than for private sector tenants. However, neither tenants, nor the public purse, nor housing generally has benefited—only private landlords. In cash terms, housing benefit for private tenants has increased 3.5 times in five years, from £1 billion in 1988-89 to £3.8 billion in 1993-94. However, in that period the number of claimants increased by only one third—by 300,000. Yes, the Treasury is right to be worried about that spiralling expenditure, but quite wrong if it believes that a policy of subsidising private landlords in that way makes any social or economic sense.

It is a matter of simple arithmetic to answer the question that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North rightly asked me. For the same money, many, many more people could have been housed in local authority or housing association homes—and they would have been better housed too. This is a crackpot policy which is wasting money and leaving people ill-housed. Do not Ministers ask themselves—

Mr. Bates: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? Please?

Mr. Straw: As the hon. Gentleman said, "please", I give way.

Mr. Bates: I am immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I remind him of an interview that he gave to "Roof" magazine, in which he set out his vision for housing in Britain, and said that his No. 1 priority would be to repeal the legislation, which was a provision to allow tenants to purchase their council homes. Does he regret that interview?

Mr. Straw: I remember the interview. I gave it in about December 1980. It was a joint interview with my good and late friend and colleague, Allan Roberts, the then Member for Bootle.

Mr. Bates: Do you agree with it now?

Mr. Straw: Do I agree with it now? Our policy has changed— *[Interruption.]*—but not quite as frequently as that of the Conservative party has changed. If the hon. Gentleman cares to read the reports of the Standing Committee on the Housing Bill for January, February and March 1980, on which I sat, he will realise that much of our opposition was not to the principle of the sale of council houses—for Conservative Members forget that the previous Labour Government had allowed local authorities to sell council houses at a discount. Our opposition to that—

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I am answering the question.

Our opposition to that was based on our anticipation that councils would not be allowed to use the capital receipts from the sale of houses to restore and renew the housing stock.

The other point of that interview, and of a speech that I gave to Shelter in July 1980, which certainly stands the test of time, was that I predicted—although I do not often get such things right—that, 10 years later, there would be a housing crisis, with many more people homeless and with a great shortage of social housing, precisely because the Government had stopped authorities from using their capital receipts.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have now given way seven times. In view of the time, I must press on.

To the extent that Ministers ask themselves the question about the—

Mr. Riddick: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but he had mentioned, before you took the Chair, that he had given way six times and that that was enough. In fact, he has now given way only five times, so, if he intended to give way six times, he has one left.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That was not a point of order—and I thought that the hon. Gentleman said seven, actually.

Mr. Straw: To the extent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Ministers ask themselves how that £2.5 billion spent on private sector landlords is being wasted, we know that they never come up with the correct answers.

Housing benefit costs are increasing. Ergo, say Ministers, it is not the cause of that vast increase that is to be tackled—spiralling Government-dictated rents—but the victims of the policy, the tenants, who are now confronted by the prospect of regional caps on housing benefit, or of all tenants being forced to pay something of their rent, however poor they are. Always remember, by the way, the provenance of the policy that tenants should pay something of their rent. It was a key part of Lady Thatcher's poll tax arrangements, and neither the policy nor she survived them.

There is worse. Such is the dogmatic refusal of Ministers to acknowledge the key role that the public sector should play in social housing that, not content with squandering an extra £2.5 billion on private landlords, even more money is to be paid to them as part of the Government's bizarre policy of changing arrangements for the homeless. The Minister spoke about that in his institute speech, saying that he wanted the private rented sector to play a "yet larger role" in solving our housing and homeless problems. But it will not solve them—it will make them worse, and at far greater cost to the taxpayer than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. *[Interruption.]* Payments by Department of Social Security claimants to private landlords is one way in which private landlords are being subsidised, but it is not the only way. Many private landlords in my constituency, and I am sure other constituencies, are encouraging criminal behaviour in the regions in which they operate to drive down the price of properties, drive out owner-occupiers and knock down

prices. They are then moving more Department of Social Security claimants into the properties and receiving more subsidy from the Government. The Government support such crooks.

Mr. Straw: To calm Conservative Members, may I say that I was reserving that intervention to bring the total number up to six. I find it difficult to count when I am talking, although I know that Conservative Members find it much easier.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) is right and raises a serious point. With some exceptions, the serious housing benefit frauds and scams are carried out not by tenants, but by landlords, who are making £3.5 billion out of the public purse. They are the biggest scroungers of the lot.

Ministers must address one last consequence of the high rents policy: its effect on economic activity in raising the level of inflation and increasing unemployment. Oxford Economic Forecasting has estimated that every 10 per cent. increase in public sector rents raises retail prices by 0.3 per cent., reduces gross domestic product by 0.1 per cent., increases unemployment by 25,000 and, overall, increases net Exchequer costs by £100 million. Where is the sense in that?

Just this morning, in complete contrast to and damnation of the Government's amendment, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a major report arguing that, unless action is taken to increase the supply of homes for rent, the housing market will be destabilised and that that "will prove damaging to the UK economy as a whole". The report calls, as we do, for an end to policies that are designed to force up rents—especially in the south—for action on mortgage arrears and repossessions, and for action on the private rented sector. Yes, we want to see a viable private rented sector, but we want landlords who accept public subsidies to accept, in return, social responsibilities, including proper regulation of the rents that they charge.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report blew another hole in the crumbling edifice of Government housing and urban policy. That policy has been dominated by defunct and discredited ideas, and has denied choice and decent housing to hundreds of thousands of our citizens. It has undermined labour mobility and is now wasting billions of pounds of the public's money.

We now need a change to sensible housing policies which, as the local elections show, people are demanding. As Howard Davies, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, recently said, the shift in subsidy from bricks and mortar to individuals has gone far enough. I would add that it must shift back the other way. Local authorities must be given back their role to build homes for rent. There must be a phased release of the £6.2 billion of capital receipts, still locked in the bank, so that councils can start using some of their money to start that new building, house those in need and put back to work some of the half million construction workers who have paid for the Government's failure by months or years on the dole.

The policy of making scapegoats of the homeless must be abandoned. The Government should recognise that homelessness, and its great increase since 1979, is not an accident or a matter of personal choice. It has arisen due to the malfunctioning of both the labour and housing markets. The double taxation of council tenants who are in work or who are retired and live just above benefit levels must end, as must the wasteful and self-defeating policy of extortionate rents in the public sector. New measures of flexible tenure must be introduced and better advice must be given to intending owner-occupiers, so that the dream of a home of one's own never again turns into a repossession nightmare for the families concerned.

Labour's approach has won the popular backing of the electorate. Following this month's Euro-elections, one can now walk from Southend to Swansea, from Dover to Dumfries entirely on Labour territory. The once dominant party of the town and city halls of England, the Conservative party, now controls just four London boroughs, one metropolitan borough and not one major town or city in the shires. Only 11 per cent. of the country's council housing stock is in Conservative hands, because the voters—owner-occupiers and council tenants alike—no longer trust the Tories to sustain their communities.

Instead, they trust us, because the people know that, from Labour, they will get sensible, thought-through policies which once again will ensure that everyone is decently housed—one of the most basic rights of any citizen in any democratic state.

4.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'commends the Government's achievements in urban and housing policy over the last 15 years, and recognises that Britain now leads the world in imaginative and constructive policy development in these areas; notes with approval the development of the Single Regeneration Budget and the Government Offices for the Regions which build on the widely recognised success of City Challenge and other initiatives; welcomes the formation of English Partnerships to carry forward the drive to improve derelict land; commends the continuing success of Urban Development Corporations in transforming areas of dereliction and disuse; notes that statutory homelessness acceptances are continuing their welcome decline; notes that housing associations are now expected to provide some 179,000 homes with Government funding over the first three years of this Parliament, substantially in excess of the 153,000 promised in 1992; congratulates the Government on the success of the Right to Buy and its tenant management initiatives; notes that the English House Conditions Survey showed an improvement in the fitness of housing in all sectors between 1986 and 1991; applauds the Government's continued efforts to secure maximum value for money from public spending, and to target resources on the areas and individuals most in need; and calls on the Government to continue to place England's urban communities at the heart of its policy, and to draw on the commitment and energy of local people and local bodies in tackling the problems of cities, while maintaining the sound public finances necessary for the sustained economic growth which is an essential component of further improvement not only in urban centres but in the whole country.'.

This debate has proceeded along the same lines as a debate that the Labour party initiated three weeks ago, when the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) opened the debate on the environment. He chose the subject matter, and in so doing highlighted the Government's success, revealing a total lack of policies from his own party. Time after time, he was challenged to produce a single proposal or policy, or even to share his general thoughts on what those policies might be. He chose his own ground and was defeated game, set and match. [HON. MEMBERS: "When did you write this?"]

I wrote it before I came here today, for two reasons: first, it concerned a debate held three weeks ago; secondly, I had read the statement by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in which he introduces the Labour party's

[Mr. John Selwyn Gummer]

housing policy and programme. I very much hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will allow me to quote with considerable freedom from that document. The hon. Member for Blackburn did not do so, for reasons that will soon become obvious.

In the three quarters of an hour that the Opposition spokesman took, not a single practical policy proposal was presented to the House. First, the hon. Gentleman said that he was in favour of the rented sector but that there was no longer a free market in that rented sector, because the controls had been taken away. That did not seem to me to follow.

Then the hon. Gentleman said, that although he was in favour of the private rented sector, he wanted to say a few words about landlords. Would any sensible person, having heard what he proceeded to say about landlords and fearing that Labour might rule in town hall, county hall or Westminster, go into the rented sector? Once again, the hon. Gentleman gave vent to one of the aspects of Labour policy that has been most damaging to our private rented sector—a deep-seated animus against any form of renting that is not controlled by Labour councils.

Today's report from Rowntree is in stark contrast to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It makes the point that we need more rented accommodation, so as to provide greater flexibility. The hon. Gentleman did not begin to deal with that, for he dare not produce any policies. He was very upset about various figures he gave us in connection with rents, but did anyone in the House hear him commit any possible future Labour Government to reducing rents? Was there any costed commitment to that?

The hon. Member for Blackburn said that there was a surplus of £600 million in the housing revenue account —and he disliked that fact. If he puts an end to that surplus, where will the £600 million come from? We heard not a word about that.

Then we come to the question of the PSBR.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I really must deal with the PSBR. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman. The PSBR deserves just a little careful consideration.

The hon. Member for Blackburn suggested that one of the things that he would do if he ever came to power was to allow what he called a phased expenditure of £5,000 million from capital receipts. Now, there is already a phased release of capital receipts, and, what is more, there have been periods in which that phasing has been made more generous. But all that has been within the PSBR as stated.

I know that the hon. Gentleman finds it difficult to count while he is talking. He finds it pretty easy to talk, so it must be the counting that is difficult. The hon. Gentleman clearly finds counting extremely difficult, because £5,000 million is rather less over five years than the Government have been spending over three years to meet more than the target for social housing in our manifesto.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Five years?

Mr. Gummer: Over three years. As a matter of fact, that is better than over five years. As I understood it, the £5,000 million was over five years. I was listening extremely carefully to the hon. Member for Blackburn, although with growing bewilderment, because what the hon. Gentleman would not say was whether, if he released the £5,000 million to the local authorities, that would be in addition to the more than £5,000 million provided at the moment for local housing associations. If it was in addition, how would it be accommodated within the PSBR?

When I have heard the hon. Gentleman before on the subject, he has said a rather curious thing. He says that that sum would not count towards the PSBR. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Why should it?"] Why should it? That is interesting. These are capital receipts, so it is not real money, and if one spends it, one has not really spent it. If it is real money, it must count towards the PSBR, because the PSBR is not some invented figure but a proper comparative figure to see how a nation—

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I shall finish this. Given how well the hon. Gentleman did with the accounting for the student games, he should listen to a bit of accounting, because it is important in this situation.

The £5 billion can only not count towards the PSBR if £5 billion is deducted from spending on housing somewhere else. If that is the case, not only will the amount of money spent on housing not be increased, but it will be decreased, because the money that is given to the housing associations levers in another 40 per cent. on top of the money that is being spent.

Mr. Straw: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I shall finish talking about the PSBR before I give way. I shall be happy to give way, but I must finish this little bit first.

I ask the hon. Gentleman a direct question. Is the £5,000 million in addition, and if so, what will be cut from the PSBR in order to accommodate it? If it is not housing that will be cut, what other sections of the welfare state would be reduced if the Labour party came to power and took that numerically ignorant view of the PSBR?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Straw: The answer is that, when the Labour party comes to power it will not be running public finances in the most appalling way that this Government are—doubling the PSBR, wasting billions of pounds of public money in public borrowing on unemployment and keeping people out of work. We will use the money to put people back to work.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer answered the Secretary of State's question himself in his November 1992 statement. He did not raise that problem about the PSBR. He saw that there was a need, yes, to provide additional resources from capital receipts and, suddenly, all the objections about the PSBR disappeared like snow in the sunshine, while restrictions on capital receipts were lifted.

In July 1983, talking about accumulated capital receipts, the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, now the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction, said:

"There simply is no excuse for authorities not using those receipts in view of the needs that the hon. Gentleman mentioned." —[*Official Report*, 5 July 1983; Vol. 45, c. 234.]

Why did the Minister not at that stage raise the spurious point about the size of the PSBR? Why has the Government's policy on that changed, not ours?

Mr. Gummer: First, I should like to return to the question that I asked the hon. Gentleman, to which we did not receive a good answer. What the hon. Gentleman must have meant was that such spending would be in addition, and if so, he really has to go to his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who specifically said that no such promises might be made by anybody on behalf of the Labour party without his permission.

Does the hon. Gentleman have that permission? [HON. MEMBERS: "Boring."] It is no good Labour Members being bored. It was the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East who said that, not me. The hon. Member for Blackburn does not like the fact that, if he released that sum outside the PSBR, he would have to cut spending somewhere else.

As for the comments of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction and others, their figures are within the PSBR as stated, and that must be right. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that, it shows that he has not yet gathered why it is that unemployment is falling in Britain and rising elsewhere.

He is saying that he would in some way get people back to work, when the policies that he is putting forward are precisely the policies that force people out of work and which in other countries mean that there are more people out of work than there are in Britain, where the tendency is for unemployment to fall all the time.

Mr. Betts: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I must go on a little; then I shall return to the hon. Gentleman, because I am looking forward to saying something about Sheffield.

I shall not follow the hon. Member for Blackburn in destruction, but will instead try to put forward a series of facts that we should remember. First, in the past 15 years, the proportion of households that are owner-occupied has increased from 56 per cent. to 67 per cent. That means that 3.6 million more families now live in a home that they own than was true in 1979, 1.5 million of them as a result of taking advantage of the right to buy, to which the Labour party was vehemently opposed.

I was surprised when the hon. Member for Blackburn replied to the perfectly innocent and reasonable quotation from a comment that he made in 1980 or 1981, when he said that his first housing priority was to repeal the right-to-buy legislation. He did not say that he would do so because he had another system to put in its place. He did not make some latter-day remark about how it was all to do with the fact that a Labour Government could not spend, or might not be able to spend, the money that came from it. If the legislation was repealed, there would not be any capital receipts. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that is true.

Mr. George Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, because it is only fair.

The hon. Member for Blackburn failed to notice that last year's English house condition survey showed that housing in all forms of tenure had improved between 1986 and 1991. The housing attitude survey which we published earlier this month showed that nine out of 10 households are satisfied with their housing.

The latest figures for those accepted as homeless by local authorities were down for the eighth quarter in a row, but the hon. Gentleman said that they had risen. He does not understand how to count. He does not understand that, when figures are going down, it means that homelessness is declining, not worsening.

Mr. George Howarth: The Secretary of State urged my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to give an indication of likely policy on rent levels under a Labour Government. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can help us to formulate that policy by indicating what he considers to be the right level of council and housing association rents for 1996 and 1997.

Mr. Gummer: During Question Time today, for which the hon. Gentleman was present, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction made clear our view that rents ought properly to reflect conditions in the wider market, and that they will rise and continue to do so. The hon. Member for Blackburn spent a great deal of time attacking the concept of rent increases, but still did not say whether he would stop them were he, in some unlikely cataclysmic event, to come to power. The hon. Gentleman cannot complain unless he says what he would do.

I remind the House of the hon. Gentleman's policies. He was in favour of new

"flexible measures of tenure".

He did not say which sort, how flexible they would be, where he would find them and how that flexibility would differ from what we already have.

The hon. Gentleman had a second policy. I am sorry that I failed to mention both policies when I said that the hon. Gentleman had not produced any policies. His second policy was that there should be better advice to home owners. That was the second of the two policies presented after the hon. Gentleman's party political tirade. He does not even understand how the PSBR works, and admitted that he cannot count while he is speaking.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): During Question Time, the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction stated that private rents are expected to rise £73 on average. He indicated that he expects housing association and council rents to reflect that in their rent increases. Does that mean that we should expect rent rises in the housing association and council sectors approximating that figure of £73? If so, will the Secretary of State say what will be the impact on housing benefit?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that because—properly, in my view—we moved the subsidy from bricks and mortar, where it was available to people whether or not they needed it, to people who do need it, it is perfectly true that, if rents rise, those who are in supported housing and unable to afford such rises have their housing benefit increased. That is how the system works. The hon. Gentleman knows that, and the hon. Member for Blackburn was complaining about it.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I must get on. I must be fair. I think that I may return to the subject in which my hon. Friend showed an interest earlier this afternoon.

At the centre of all the remarks of the hon. Member for Blackburn was the importance of local authorities taking greater control of housing. I understand that the hon. Gentleman claims to be keen about Labour local authorities. He made considerable play of his support for them. I am surprised at that, because, in his day job as minder for one of Labour's leadership candidates, the hon. Gentleman visited the constituency of Monklands, East —where we can see what a Labour local authority is like. It spends £57 per head in Airdrie, and £450 in Coatbridge.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House is debating a motion concerning housing and urban policy in England. Is the Secretary of State in order in raising issues outside the motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The amendment refers to Britain, so allusions to Britain are entirely in order—but anything substantive would be out of order.

Mr. Gummer: I am alluding to something in Scotland as a terrible example for those of us who live south of the border. I point out to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how touchy Labour becomes if anybody mentions the problems of Monklands, because that is where—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is a question not of the Opposition being touchy, but of the Chair ruling something out of order. The motion is clear, as is the amendment. I repeat that allusions to Britain, which includes Scotland, are entirely in order, but that anything substantive is not.

Mr. Gummer: I am of course happy fully to obey your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Therefore, my allusion will conclude with one further sentence. Vulnerable people living in Airdrie receive £57 and vulnerable people in Coatbridge receive £450, because the council puts its money where it thinks the votes are. I am in quite a strong position to make that point.

That leads me to the rest of Britain, but particularly to England. If we are asked to put the future of all those people who need supported housing in the hands of local authorities and in the hands of Labour, as the hon. Member for Blackburn would like, we should know who they are and how they would operate. We do not have to speculate about something as unlikely as a Labour Government, but we can talk about the reality of Labour local government.

We can see Labour at work in Lambeth, Hackney, Liverpool and Birmingham. No one who takes a close look likes what they see. They see huge numbers of empty houses—management voids empty and ready to be let, but remaining empty through inefficiency. Hackney has 2,000, Manchester has 1,300, and Liverpool has 1,000. All top 10 local councils for voids are socialist-controlled, with a shameful total of 10,000 empty houses to their discredit.

The story is as shameful in respect of other aspects of socialist housing policy. In rent collection, seven out of the top 10 councils for rent arrears are socialist-controlled—including dear old Lambeth, which at one time had a policy of non-collection of rents. The level of rents does not matter if one does not collect them.

The largest local authority debts are held by the famous 10 Labour authorities. In Hackney, 1,100 of the council's 40,000 properties are thought to be illegally occupied. In Haringey, the local ombudsman discovered that 88 per cent. of councillors' letters to the housing department went without reply. That is how Labour wants the housing of our most vulnerable people to be organised.

Having made one or two remarks against Labour local authorities, it is only fair to quote what Labour says about its own authorities. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said about Islington that it was a "good, radical, progressive left-wing authority". Labour means by that a council that had £18.6 million rent arrears in March 1993 and which paid a firm to maintain communal television aerials on a block of flats 10 years after they had been demolished.

That is what is meant by a "good, radical, progressive, left-wing authority"—one that has rent arrears in a society in which housing benefit provides the means whereby those who cannot afford to pay rent can get it from the state.

Mr. Straw: In case the right hon. Gentleman has not noticed it, there are virtually no Conservative housing authorities left. Therefore, Labour authorities and those with no overall control will be at the top, in the middle and at the bottom of every list—except for one.

I have the returns for every authority, provided by the Department of the Environment, showing the number of homes in each local authority area that are available to let, but are not let. At the very top is a local authority that has only 40 houses in its stock, but 32 per cent. of those are unlet, even though they are available to let. That council is Suffolk Coastal, the Conservative council in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. Gummer: Oh, I have been so looking forward to this moment. Suffolk Coastal is a progressive authority that has sold its entire housing stock, bar 40, to a housing association. Those 40 houses are for emergency help for the homeless. They exist for precisely the people about whom the hon. Gentleman should care. The trouble with the Labour party is that it likes making party political comments, but it does not care sufficiently about the homeless to provide space for them when they need it.

What would the Labour party do with those houses? Would it leave them empty for the homeless, or would it simply not provide that accommodation? I know what would happen—it would have a large number of empty houses, but it would not be able to find them when they were needed for the homeless. That is what happens in Hackney and Haringey, where the Labour party keeps control of all its stock.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Gummer: I am giving the Opposition a chance not to put their foot in it again.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman later, because he knows a great deal more about the issue than his party's Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

I want to give one or two examples of what the Labour party says about its own councils. That will help us to decide whether it is reasonable to suggest that, instead of

housing being provided effectively by housing associations, we should put it into the hands of Labour authorities. The Labour document on Camden said about itself that there had been

"chronic overspending on homelessness"

because of

"slack management and a reluctance to address the issue of living within the budget."

What that really means for decent people needing a home is that they do not get them because of

"slack management and a reluctance to address the issue of living within the budget."

That is precisely what would happen if we returned to the old system of supporting people by means of bricks and mortar, and gave money to Labour authorities like those to which I have referred.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I want to quote another example before giving way.

The former Labour leader of Liverpool council, Mr. Keva Coombes, said:

"We are the worst landlord in Liverpool, probably in the country . . . It takes genius; voids gone up; rent arrears soared . . . the breaking of the law on racial equality . . . Tenants get an appalling service . . . I think the fundamental cause is, frankly, we've put the interests of the providers of the service, the workforce, above the interests of the tenants."

That is the problem. That is what Labour councils always do. They are the representatives not of the electorate, not of the tenants, not of the people, but of the General and Municipal Workers Union, which pays the piper and calls the tune.

Mr. Raynsford *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I shall give way in a moment. I have a point to make about the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. Raynsford: I can hardly wait.

Mr. Gummer: I hope the hon. Gentleman can wait, because I am going to ask him a question about it. Keva Coombes's point about the interests of the providers coming first might strike a chord with the millions of commuters who still wait for any candidate for the Labour leadership to condemn the RMT for striking to get 11 per cent. without strings. Not one of them has done so. There would not be any money at all for housing under a Labour Government. The Labour party is committed to handing out money to anyone, from any union and however ridiculous the claim, who threatens it with a strike.

The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) might want to think about how he would answer his constituents if asked whether he supported a strike for 11 per cent. without strings. They would then know whether he would have any money left for housing if the Labour party were in power.

Mr. Raynsford: I will not succumb to the temptation to respond to the right hon. Gentleman, for fear of incurring your wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Will the right hon. Gentleman pay attention to a concept that has all-party agreement? It is that the worst possible way to deal with the problem of homelessness is to put homeless people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I do not think anyone believes that that would be the right thing to do. What is the right hon. Gentleman's view on the record of Wandsworth council, which at the last count had 435 families in bed and breakfast, the highest figure of any council in London, and even the whole country? It is squandering £5 million a year on that inappropriate and unsuitable accommodation. It is wasting public money.

Mr. Gummer: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Wandsworth council has particular problems. In case he missed the figures, I can tell him that the number of homeless people in bed and breakfast has fallen this year by a further 30 per cent. That is the effect of the Government's policies.

I am still hoping that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will have noticed that he has become a candidate for the Labour leadership. All the candidates have refused to answer the simple question about whether or not they support the RMT strike.

The Labour party does not care about tenants or home owners. It is the party that opposed every reform of housing that we have introduced during the past 15 years. It opposed the right to buy; it opposed tenant empowerment; it opposed the rent-to-mortgage scheme; it opposed leasehold enfranchisement; and it opposed compulsory competitive tendering on housing management, which would do so much to improve the standards of management on even the worst estates in Labour authorities. It opposed housing action trusts, and it opposed estate action. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that I heard certain words uttered from a sedentary position.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I withdraw, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am most grateful.

Mr. Gummer: The Labour party is the party of preserving cosy relations with its friends in the unions and the direct labour organisations. In contrast, we are the party of the tenant; we are the party of the leaseholder; we are the party of the home owner.

The fact is that all the new ideas in housing have come from the Government. During the whole of the debate and in the preceding Environment questions, Labour Members did not put forward a single new idea, other than flexible tenancies and giving more advice. We have introduced the right to buy; tenants' rights; housing action trusts; estate action; the initiative to use flats over shops; the cash incentive and tenants' incentive schemes to enable yet more people to own their own homes; and stock transfers —all the things that lie behind the improvement in people's housing in Britain.

We will go further, because there is more work to be done. There is a deep sense of unfairness that would-be tenants in needy positions find they get entirely different treatment. The definition of homelessness is such that there are those who will never be housed because, however dreadful their conditions, they technically have a roof over their heads. By contrast, there are others living relatively comfortably in the parental home who, because they are technically homeless when their relations threaten to throw them out, are by law enabled to jump the queue.

That is why we have introduced proposals for a single waiting list, where real need and not technicalities will determine those with priority need for a home. The one issue that matters is need. Being genuinely homeless is a searing experience, and we propose that much more should be done by local authorities and others to prevent it. We are

[Mr. Gummer]

absolutely clear that there must continue to be a proper safety net for those who become homeless through no fault of their own.

It seems to me irrefutable that, having helped homeless people through their immediate crisis, a local authority should then be able to take a considered view about the proper allocation of one of its most valuable resources and assets. We hope to tell the House our conclusions on the consultation exercise before the summer recess.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I really must get on. I may come back to the hon. Gentleman if I have a chance to do so.

I have already thanked the hon. Member for Blackburn for giving me the opportunity to explain the success of the Government's housing policy so clearly. I must also thank him for allowing me a second bite at the cherry—for he went on to offer us a chance to illustrate, yet again, the true success of our inner-city policies.

It was in September 1987 that my right hon. and noble Friend the then Member of Parliament for Finchley stood in the middle of a huge area of urban dereliction in Teesside and vowed that "we must change all this". The initiatives of successive Secretaries of State for the Environment have indeed changed all that. I salute their achievements for the inner cities, and am personally determined to continue to take that revolution forward.

The hon. Member for Blackburn decided to make much of the Robson report. I looked carefully at his copy; it contains a number of pieces of paper, suggesting that he has read at least part of it. It is a long report and there is a great deal in it, but some—including the report's authors—might suggest that the hon. Gentleman's selection of quotations was, at best, partial. It would be better to say that, rather than relying on the report itself, the hon. Gentleman relied on press coverage of it. His speech provided no evidence that he had read it with the detail that I would expect from him.

Mr. Straw: I have read it all.

Mr. Gummer: I did not say that the hon. Gentleman had not read the report; I said that his speech contained no evidence that he had read it. Otherwise I might have to accuse him of partiality—and that, of course, I would never do.

The fact is that the report's authors were driven to say of the press coverage:

"the headlines misrepresent the conclusions at which we arrived".

In fact, the report makes it clear that, overall, there was an improvement in the fortunes of urban priority areas because of the action taken by the Government. There were new jobs, new homes and new hope.

If the hon. Member for Blackburn wants to see a specific example, I hope that he will read again the issue of the *Independent on Sunday* to which he rightly referred—I think he mentioned a leak, although I am not sure where it came from—and which has so coloured his thinking. He should read the report headed "Broadwater Farm Reaps Fruit of Reinvention". The article reports that Broadwater Farm now

"looks like one of the better European apartment blocks",

that

"much has changed since [the riot] in October, 1985",

and:

"Much of the Farm's bad reputation is now undeserved and crime on the Estate is below the average".

That revolution in Broadwater Farm has come about as a result of estate action funding—a Government success story. How that factual report contrasts with the tendentious nonsense that the hon. Gentleman spoke about the report.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I trust that my right hon. Friend noticed that the authors of the report themselves say that they had to include many caveats. For instance, they cannot analyse what would have happened if we had not introduced all the various schemes for inner-city development.

I remind my right hon. Friend that, in the mid-1970s, 63 per cent. of the amount that the then Labour Government were putting into the rate support grant was public money. The whole focus of their urban redevelopment programme was the public sector and public money—and we got no results. For 15 years, we had nothing in docklands from the joint development board; we had nothing in the centres of Liverpool and Leeds, and nothing on Teesside.

Mr. Gummer: This document clearly shows, however, that the Government's major initiatives have achieved significant success. It also suggests that their effect would be better if we had a policy that drew them together on a regional basis—which is precisely what we have done through the single regeneration budget, and by establishing a single Government office to cover the four departments which are most directly affected, and which had regional representation before. We have done the very thing that the authors thought would most commit us to those regional arrangements.

The report makes an interesting statement about local government, referring to

"Local authorities—in their newly emergent roles as enables and facilitators".

Who made local authorities enablers and facilitators? The present Government, with their legislation. Who opposed every step down the line? That party, and above all that spokesman. Whenever he spoke on education—as when he speaks on inner cities—he objected to any concept of enabling and facilitating. What he wanted was owning, controlling, insisting and running. That is the kind of local authority that the hon. Gentleman wants, but it is not the kind with which this document suggests we establish a partnership.

Mr. Straw: Would the Secretary of State care to read the rest of the sentence that he quoted? The sentence reads:

"Local authorities—in their newly emergent roles as enablers and facilitators"—

there is plenty more about local authorities, and how they have been denied a role—

"need to be given greater opportunities to play a significant part in such coalitions"—

that is, between public and private sectors. Would the Secretary of State like to tell us what greater chance authorities will be given to do that?

Mr. Gummer: What does the hon. Gentleman think the single regeneration budget is about, if it is not about making that partnership proper? He knows that; he knows that that is the opportunity. But, of course, authorities will

not get the money unless they show that they are enablers and facilitators. They will not be given it if they are merely controllers and holders.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. Time is moving on.

Let me remind the Labour party of the enormous success of the urban development that has resulted from the work of the urban development corporations. In Newcastle, the former Vickers Armstrong engineering works had become a derelict eyesore. The Tyne and Wear development corporation has transformed the site into the Newcastle business park—60 acres of award-winning landscaped development, providing 670,000 sq ft of office space, which was quickly let to major companies such as British Airways, Allied Dunbar and IBM, and providing the very employment that we care about in the inner cities. Labour Governments never managed to deal with that when they were constantly directing public funds into local authorities.

In Sheffield, the development corporation has reclaimed nearly 500 acres of derelict and contaminated land, attracted more than £500 million in private investment, secured the development of 300,000 sq m of office, commercial and warehouse space, and created or safeguarded some 10,000 jobs.

Mr. Betts: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: Just a moment. I want to contrast that success with the debacle of the world student games in which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) played such a prominent role. We need only compare what the urban development corporation has done in Sheffield with the failure of Sheffield's city corporation to produce the answers to its own unemployment problem to understand why our systems work, and why the Labour party is always at a loss for an answer.

Mr. Betts: That is a very unfair comparison. We should not compare the regeneration brought about by the city council, with its limited resources, with what has happened to land for which the urban development corporation is responsible.

I am sure that the Secretary of State does not wish to mislead the House. He mentioned 10,000 jobs and £500 million in private investment; much of that is connected with the Meadowhall shopping centre, which accounts for more than 6,000 of those jobs. Sheffield city council gave planning permission, working alongside private developers, before the establishment of the development corporation. Will the Secretary of State now correct the information that he gave the House?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to congratulate Sheffield city council on giving planning permission that it was its duty to give. It would only give planning permission if it was right to do so; I am sure that it would not do so in an improper way. It could claim credit only if it had granted planning permission when others would not have done so. I believe that planning permission is open to everyone. Since when has the system been operated only by the Labour party in Sheffield?

On Teesside, developments in the Teesdale project in Stockton include the Tees barrage, a new bridge providing better access, a university college, housing and other commercial building. Those developments are helping to transform what was derelict and polluted industrial wasteland into a site of major commercial significance.

Of course, we can compare what has happened under our system with what happened when the Labour party ran such systems. The results are there for all to see. The systems that we have used have brought in great sums from the private sector, whereas those that the Labour party produced were merely a drain on the public sector. People from the United States are now beating a path to our door to learn what we are doing, whereas previously we had to go there to learn what they were doing.

We shall see more, through English Partnerships and the rest, such as the £102 million programme of environmental projects. More than 100 projects across all parts of England will reclaim derelict, vacant and contaminated land—

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: I have given way more often than the Opposition spokesman did, and now I must come to the end of what I have to say.

Mr. Madden *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: No, I must come to the end of my speech, and I want to return to the hon. Member for Blackburn.

What the country really wants to know—indeed, what the grass roots of the Labour party really want to know—is what the Labour party really stands for, not only on housing and inner cities, but on everything. If we listen carefully, we hear a good deal of talk about vision and the far prospects, and much use of words that could happily be used in advertisements for lavatory tissue—soft, sensitive words—but no words saying what Labour would actually do.

I therefore thought that I ought to read what the hon. Member for Blackburn had written in his press release explaining the Labour party's document, "City 2020", in which it is difficult indeed to discover what Labour's powerful propositions, its determined agenda and its specific proposals are. Page 1 of the press release does not refer to housing at all. Page 2 is full of concrete proposals such as the following:

"Our strategy should start by being unashamedly proud of the diversity and vibrancy of urban life. Some of the finest aspects of our common culture are represented in our cities."

What a revelation. What an enchanting prospect. No one has ever heard of that before. In 2,000 years of urban living, nobody thought of that—and it must be the highlight of the document, for it appears in a press release, containing only the short bits.

The hon. Gentleman did not finish there; he had more to tell us:

"Local people must be seen as part of the answer not part of the problem."

What a remarkable insight. It did not come from the Liberal Democratic party, although it might well have done. The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) knows that that phrase could well have come from one of his "Focus" leaflets. We have read that sentence before.

The hon. Member for Blackburn then continued; I suppose that he wanted to define more clearly what he meant:

"Such a people-led urban policy must by definition also be flexible".

[Mr. Gummer]

Flexible—there is a word for the new Labour party. Labour is so flexible that it has no policies to be flexible about. If one has no policies, flexibility is one's only claim.

The press release continues:

"Policies which try to straitjacket local initiatives only lead to waste and inefficiency as well as resentment and alienation."

Next, the document says:

"The final plank of the strategy"—

those are the words of the hon. Member for Blackburn; we have heard the rest of it and now we come to the final plank—

"is in some ways the most important and that is to foster a proper debate in this country"—

not a debate about housing or urban renewal, but

"a proper debate . . . about public space."

The most public of spaces in the debate has been the public space that has not been filled by the Labour party's policy. After 15 years of pregnancy, all that has come forth from the Labour party is a load of wind. The fact is that Labour has no urban policy and no housing policy, yet it has dared to waste the time of the House debating a presentation in which it has presented nothing more than a promise to be flexible and a promise to talk about space.

5.24 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I represent an inner-city constituency in which many thousands of people live in poverty. Some 25 per cent. of my constituents—and a far higher percentage of my young constituents—are unemployed, and there is overcrowding, homelessness and deprivation on a large scale. If my constituents had been able to listen for the past 50 minutes to the Secretary of State's bombastic student union speech, which was supposed to be dealing with the most profound urban problems affecting the people of this country, they would be in even greater despair. Some little while ago I described the Secretary of State for the Environment as a political pipsqueak. In the light of the deplorable and sickening performance that we have just heard, I now realise what lavish praise that was.

I made my maiden speech on housing 24 years ago; 24 years later the situation in my constituency is in many ways worse than it was when I entered the House. During the period of the Labour Government from 1974 to 1979, my city and my constituency had an excellent house-building record. The Labour Government of 1974 launched a house-building drive and encouraged local authorities to take over empty privately built properties that developers could not sell.

I was the junior Minister who had responsibility for that programme, and I remember the President of the Board of Trade, when Secretary of State for the Environment accusing me of going around the country stirring up councils to build houses. He regarded that as an extraordinary performance. From the Government Front Bench, I put through the Housing Act 1974, which gave an expanded role to housing associations, and more money, a greater role and greater responsibility to the Housing Corporation. Under the Labour Government from 1974 to 1979, repair and renovation grants were easily available, and the owner-occupiers in my constituency—they are in the majority there—could renovate their homes and make them more habitable.

The slums were being removed; we had massive slum clearance programmes. I shall not say that the situation in the country, in my city of Manchester or in my constituency was anything like paradise. There were extremely serious problems, some of which, such as the building of tower blocks and deck access accommodation, were encouraged by the Conservative Government in which Sir Keith Joseph, as he then was, was the Minister of Housing.

An excrescence in my constituency, which looked like a French foreign legion fort and was described by local people as "Fort Ardwick", had been built by the Conservative party during its three years in control of Manchester city council, from 1968 to 1971. Because that was such an odious development it has now been totally demolished—but the people of the city of Manchester will be paying the loan charges for that Conservative folly for many years to come. Things were not as satisfactory as they might have been, but during that period, things were getting better. We had a good housing budget, we had a good house-building programme, we had good encouragement for private developers and we had relatively low mortgages.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. Many other hon. Members want to speak, including three of my hon. Friends who wish to make their maiden speeches. I do not, therefore, wish to take up an excessive amount of the House's time.

The situation now in the constituency that I have represented for almost a quarter of a century is worse than at any time during that period. The responsibility lies pretty well entirely with this Conservative Government. They have wiped out the local authority housing programme in my city. In the last year of the Labour Government, 1,070 new starts in local authority housing were made in the city of Manchester. In the last year of that Labour Government, there were 729 completions of local authority dwellings in the city of Manchester. In the past financial year in Manchester, new starts were nil and completions were nil.

Under previous Governments, Conservative and Labour, housing associations were regarded as a useful and important social supplement to local authority housing. That is why I put through the Housing Act in 1974, which gave added resources and responsibilities and a new role to housing associations. The Government have now decided that housing associations, which are not democratically accountable in any way—although they still do useful work—should replace local authorities as providers of public sector rented accommodation. Unfortunately, they are not filling the gap left by the total abolition of local authority housing programmes in Manchester. In the past financial year in my city of Manchester, housing association starts were 544—only half the number of local authority starts under the Labour Government. Completions were 607—well below the number of completions under the Labour Government.

Nor is the private sector filling the gap. In my city in the past financial year, private sector starts were 544 and completions were 269. The exceptionally important role, in a city of great poverty and great housing need, which was filled by the local authority is being filled neither by the housing associations nor by the private sector.

Mr. Thomason: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. I have already told the House—I do not wish to be discourteous—that there is great pressure on time. The 10-minutes rule will come into effect in 28 minutes. Three of my hon. Friends want to make their maiden speeches. With great respect and with no discourtesy to the hon. Gentleman, I say that I hope that he will forgive me for not giving way.

In my city of Manchester, there is a waiting list of 27,136, yet we cannot build a single new house to go towards shortening that waiting list. There is terrible overcrowding and there is dreadful homelessness. The local authority fulfils its responsibilities to the homeless more than most other local authorities do, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) pointed out, by doing so, it is putting incredibly large sums into the hands, pockets and bank accounts of exploitative private landlords. We have far too many such landlords in my constituency. They harass tenants when the local authority imposes a ceiling on the extortionate rents that they require to be paid.

The fact is that the Government do not subsidise tenants any more; they subsidise landlords. They turn landlords into millionaires through homelessness. Instead of putting money into the pockets of private, exploitative landlords who harass people, the Government could do far greater good if they used the money to allow local authorities to build new houses to house my constituents and others who are living in such misery.

Discretionary grants for owner-occupiers have almost dried up. Mandatory grants have to be provided, of course. When I go round my constituency and talk to owner-occupiers whose houses are in great need of repair, they tell me that they need grants. These are the owner-occupiers whose number the Government are proud to say they have increased. Yet my owner-occupiers, living in Victorian and early Edwardian houses, are unable to get the discretionary grants that would make their living conditions and the living conditions of their children better. There is a growing backlog of repairs because of the ring fencing of the housing revenue account. Of all the ghastly things that the Government have done to housing, one of the most ghastly is the way in which the poor are forced to subsidise the poor. Rents have had to be increased substantially.

Government subsidy has fallen in real terms—and I do not mean Government subsidy to landlords, which has multiplied unconscionably. Government subsidy to the city of Manchester has fallen in real terms, as have housing investment programme allocations. In 1979-80, the last year of the Labour Government, the amount was £64.8 million. In 1993-94 money, that is £154.9 million. Yet the housing investment programme allocation for my city in 1993-94 is only £27.6 million. In cash terms, that is less than half what it was under the Labour Government. In real terms, it is less than one fifth of what it was under the Labour Government.

The Government have reduced Manchester's housing spending by 82 per cent. and that reduction has been responsible for the terrible housing problem in my constituency. Most of my advice bureaux are filled with people in terrible housing need. They are homeless people, people who are being persecuted by private landlords, people who are living in box rooms in their parents' homes and people who are separated from their wives because they cannot find a house in which their baby can be born. That is what the Government have done directly; it is their responsibility and no one else's. Yet we heard bombastic rubbish from the Secretary of State for the Environment, who proclaimed the success of the inner-city policy. My inner-city constituents would not have recognised what he was talking about.

My constituency is deprived not only in terms of housing need but in terms of environment and amenity —and here, too, the Government must take most of the blame. They have bled my city of Manchester of finance. During the 1980s, the Government cut the grant to Manchester city council—what was originally the rate support grant and then became the revenue support grant —in cash terms, by more than £500 million. If one extends that cut into the 1994-95 financial year—the current year —and adjusts the figure for inflation, one sees that the Government have taken about £1 billion of grant away from the city of Manchester.

Other particular and specific sources of funding for my city and for my deprived constituents have been wiped out. In 1991-92, we had £1 million in urban programme grant; that has gone completely. Section 11 funding has gone completely. I represent a constituency that has a substantial ethnic minority population. We had section 11 schemes in schools in my constituency, such as Stanley Grove school, which is in an area of intense poverty and deprivation. That section 11 money has gone. Estate action funding has gone, yet our needs grow the whole time.

My constituents are good at self-help. They are proud people, active people, innovative people and enterprising people. They work hard to improve their lives and environment and they do so in every way they can think of. They do so by having events that bring the community together, such as the Abbey Hey carnival, which took place in my constituency last Saturday. My constituency is impoverished. My constituents can generate enthusiasm and they can generate effort and they do both, but they cannot generate cash because they have little cash and because so many of them are out of work in any case.

Our community organisations have faced lean times. The Gorton community centre and the Birch community centre, which both provide services for the deprived, for pensioners and for young people, nearly had to close. The Trinity Baptist church in Gorton, which I have visited, provides facilities for the young, for the old and for the poor, and does so in a derelict building, which, in many ways is uninhabitable. The church provides those facilities because it views it as its role to do so. It has a development plan. We need permission for that development plan and we need money for it. But we are not going to get it from this Government. We may get a few smarmy words about what a good idea it is, but that is as far as it will go.

In an area of huge youth unemployment, the Abbey Hey area—and youth unemployment covers a great deal more of my constituency than that area—we have an excellent amateur football club, the Abbey Hey amateur football club. It needs new dressing rooms. Would it not be better for that football club to be able to enhance its role to keep young people off the streets? Apparently not, because we do not get a penny from the Government for any of it. During the past three or four years, and after 24 years in the House of Commons, I have had to take up writing begging letters to try to scrounge money for causes in my

[Mr. Kaufman]

constituency, which help the unemployed and the poor and which try to reduce crime but which the Government will not help in any way.

One estate in my constituency, the Anson estate, has dreadful crime problems. It also has dreadful unemployment problems. We have been campaigning and trying to get some kind of finance to establish a youth facility on that estate. It would create an enormous impression on the people there and would assist in dealing with severe social problems. We have not received a penny from the Government—and the council, because of what the Government have done to it, cannot provide the money either.

While local endeavour is hamstrung because of what the Government have done, bodies which used to be accountable to the public are exacerbating the problems in my constituency. North West Water is behaving like a corporate vandal in my constituency. Debdale lane, a statutory bridleway, is now infested with vehicular traffic —against the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981— because North West Water is impervious to the requests of the people. So one little area of my constituency where people could safely take their children is being taken away.

Railtrack, the body now responsible, is failing totally to respond to requests from my constituency to remove a substation on Vine street, near which one child has already been electrocuted and where other children are in danger of electrocution. Railtrack does not respond to my constituents or to me when I write to it. Railtrack is failing to provide fencing next to the Abbey Hey football club and, although the body has accepted that there are safety implications, it has left it to the football club to spend £1,600 which the club cannot afford and for which it has received no recompense.

Youths congregate around two telephone boxes in one area of my constituency, and guns have been sighted there on occasions. The police have written to British Telecom asking it to remove those two telephone boxes. A superintendent of Greater Manchester police has written to BT and I have written to it, but it will do nothing whatever.

We are ignored by the Government. We are ignored when we ask for anything and we are ignored when we ask to be enabled to do things for ourselves. We have poverty, we have unemployment, we have homelessness, we have overcrowding and we have environmental deterioration. Yet the Government and the Secretary of State stand there and say that inner-city policy is a success.

We who live in the inner city see no such success. We who live in the inner city deplore the way in which the Government make silly declarations that have no relevance to our constituents' lives. That is why we cannot wait for the day when we get a Labour Government—a Government who will concern themselves with the real needs of the inner city and do something to remedy those needs.

5.45 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I will not follow directly the line taken by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on the subject of housing, but I shall remark on what he said. He is a fine, partisan politician and he has made an appropriate case about some serious problems in a constituency which, we all accept, has great social difficulties. However, the right hon. Gentleman has been around as long as I have and I remember the days when we had a Labour Government.

I remember the days when we all put exactly those sort of constituency issues to Ministers like him, when he was the Minister with responsibility for housing. I remember the days when a Labour Secretary of State said that the party was over and local authorities received the biggest squeeze ever in a single year. All the personal constituency complaints that he has raised today were raised then.

The right hon. Gentleman ought to have acknowledged that there has been much improvement. Many schemes help housing problems. He did not give any gracious thought at all to the whole housing association movement —not a mention. [HON. MEMBERS: "He did".] Well, he passed it by. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] He did not acknowledge that it was a Conservative achievement and a Conservative concept. It has transformed public housing in this country. In contrast, there has been no evidence whatever of municipal or council housing doing anything in the way of good estates and involvement—[HON. MEMBERS: "He set up the housing associating movement."] —or anything like the quality of the work of the Housing Corporation or housing associations.

Mr. Kaufman: I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman can say what he has just said. Not only did I refer at length to housing associations, I also pointed out —clearly, he was not listening—that I was the Minister responsible for steering through the House the Housing Act 1974, which gave added funding, added responsibilities and an added role to the housing associations and to the Housing Corporation. Either the hon. Gentleman was not listening or he has decided not to pay attention to the achievements of the Labour Government.

Dr. Hampson: The House will notice that the right hon. Gentleman said "added". The concept was the Conservative Government's creation. The concept of the whole thing certainly did not come from Labour. Labour would have gone on with municipal and council housing ad nauseam. Furthermore, the great triumph—the period of maximum expansion, at an unprecedented rate, in Housing Corporation funds—was under this Conservative Government and certainly not under a Labour Government. I am not going to debate that aspect of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, but it is only fair that we put the matter into perspective. The right hon. Gentleman totally and deliberately ignored the context and, of course, made no mention of what it used to be like.

The idea that we can cure the long-standing problems of decline in inner cities in a decade is absurd. There have been huge demographic changes and a movement out of city centres of the core investment in manufacturing industry, which was there for 100 years but which no longer exists in any country in the modern world. That drift of basic manufacturing out of the city centres has caused the dilemma that we face, because with it have gone jobs in the inner cities and naturally, with that, housing. People living in the inner cities want to own their houses and do not want to rent places in vast, sprawling, totally unattractive council estates. In many cities—in the right hon. Gentleman's city and in mine—such estates have been knocked down in the past few decades. All that wonderful council housing of which the right hon. Gentleman is so proud has gone.

People have left the inner cities to move into areas where they can buy a decent house. Of course, there has also been a collapse of family life. We are all desperately struggling to curb crime in the inner cities.

The idea that all this is somehow the responsibility of Government is nonsense. I do not know about the council budget in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is probably similar to that in Leeds. Leeds council has £1,000 million a year to spend. That is a huge amount of money by any stretch of the imagination. The Government, in the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980, freed councils, allowing them to determine their priorities much more and to move their moneys around without detailed control from the centre.

If the right hon. Gentleman wants to check crime in his estates, if he wants youth centres or video cameras and surveillance, they can be paid for by his local council determining that they are the priorities, not some of its other stupid priorities. The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) knows that Leeds has paid for some of those schemes out of its own funds.

I shall move on to the central issue that I want to raise. I want to say something about the Robson report and, directly in that context, about the north-east where I was raised and the city of Leeds, which I represent. It is worth pointing out that, throughout that huge report, stress is placed on the caveats, and reference is made to a wide range of policy instruments, which are applied at different times from different starting points with inherently different strengths and weaknesses. It says that there is "a whole series of permutations and combinations of relationships".

It is hard to come to any positive and clear conclusions. The report says that the measurements used are relatively limited. The outputs that are measured are unemployment, job growth, the creation of small businesses and fluctuating house prices. That is not only what it should be about.

One of the themes that I want to develop is this: the Government set the task, usually through urban development corporations, of physically transforming inner cities, not only because of the jobs that might be created in a particular area but because of the rejuvenation of the whole city. In Leeds, the LDC's developments gave hope to the whole community. It allowed Leeds to develop and use its potential to become the capital of the north and one of the leading cities in Europe, which is the aim of the Labour city council.

We have sought to use the catalyst of physical recreation in the inner city to create opportunities in the city as a whole. The knock-on effect of developments in one part of the city is stupendous for other areas. I shall give some examples from Leeds. The south side of Boar lane, the main road coming out of the station, has been a disgrace for decades. When I was there 20 years ago, there were squalid little shops. It was under blight for 25 years.

The Urban Development Corporation totally transformed the south side. It is now full of fine attractive businesses. I give credit to the Labour council because its site—the south side—has now undergone a facelift. Improvements on the riverside frontage and along the canal are only just beginning. The scale of those improvements will be beyond belief. The royal armouries have been attracted from the Tower of London to the canal zone of the Leeds docks by the Urban Development Corporation. That will in turn attract more than 500,000 tourists a year—tourists in Leeds!—which will have a knock-on effect for restaurants, for bistros and for job creation in the area.

For the first time in the history of Leeds, the city centre, where people go for leisure activities and people live and enjoy life, will move south of the railway tracks. The transformation is only just beginning. As a result of the development, Tetley has built a museum of the pub—another tourist centre. People must be lunatics not to see that the development corporation has transformed the area. The same can be said about the Albert dock in Liverpool and the dock area in Hartlepool. When I was a child, we would not dream of going anywhere near Hartlepool. We would go to Sunderland or Newcastle, hardly ever Middlesbrough and certainly not Hartlepool to shop. There has now been a physical change in Hartlepool.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South knows that the improvements around Hunslet Green and the development of a business centre by the Urban Development Corporation have produced investment by First Direct on the Waddington site next door.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose—*

Dr. Hampson: The hon. Gentleman should let me finish my point. I am sure that he will agree there have been substantial improvements in the Hunslet and Holbeck areas, which have resulted from the work, the stimulus and the catalytic effect of the Leeds development corporation, which has brought together a partnership of the city council and private enterprise. At the heart of the Robson report is a recommendation about partnerships.

Mr. Gunnell *rose—*

Dr. Hampson: I shall give way in a moment. Obviously, I cannot accept too many interventions, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

At the heart of the recommendations is not only the proposal that there should be a pulling together of Government departmental activities, which the Government have already done, but that local authorities should be a significant part of the coalitions that are involved—the activators. That is what we have been trying to do. There has been an attempt to create a real partnership of all the active participants.

In the old days before the Tories came to power, there were no coalitions—there was no active participation by the private sector; it was all done through the public sector. The new coalitions are physically transforming those areas and the knock-on effect for surrounding areas has been huge. The private sector has also put resources into the surrounding areas because the transformation has had a stimulating and catalytic effect.

In Leeds, for every £1 of public money, £6 of private money has been put in. Of course, not all local councils have the same leverage ability. In Manchester, it is much less, but on average, £1 of public money pulls in £4 of private money. Partnership coalitions have worked, as against the non-coalitions of the Labour years, which rarely produced results in Holbeck, Hunslet, cental Leeds, Teesside, Tyneside or docklands

Mr. Gunnell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the city council has played a major role in the developments to which he referred? Before the Urban Development Corporation was created, the city council started what was happening on Boar lane as a result of its renovations of the

[Mr. Gunnell]

corn exchange. The hon. Gentleman said that the royal armouries were won by the Urban Development Corporation. However, he should know that they were won by a joint presentation from the city council and the Urban Development Corporation.

The hon. Gentleman knows that I was a member of the Urban Development Corporation. I was placed on the Urban Development Corporation as a member of the city council to ensure that partnership took place. He should acknowledge that progress in Leeds has been the result of partnership, not the result of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Traditionally, interventions are short, especially when we have a 10-minute restriction on speeches.

Dr. Hampson: I thought that I had made it clear that I was talking about partnerships. I acknowledge that partnerships have come together, but the catalyst was the Urban Development Corporation. There has been much more transformation in Leeds since the creation of the Urban Development Corporation because it has attracted private capital. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the city council played no initiating role in attracting the royal armouries; the chief executive of the Urban Development Corporation took the initiative. I say that simply to put the record straight, although the partnership made it successful.

I conclude by referring to some of the overall success stories. We have 17 new restaurants and two new hotels. The canal system has attracted some wonderful places for people to enjoy themselves. There are about 400 to 500 new housing units in various parts of the inner city. There has been more than 3,800,000 sq ft of non-housing commercial and industrial development. About 144 acres of derelict, underused, polluted land have been transformed, as is the case in London's docklands and Liverpool's. Who was responsible for that?

For 15 years, we had local government report after report and discussion after discussion, but nothing happened in docklands. I can remember flying, with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, over the London docklands in a helicopter, and seeing the devastation. We realised that we had to pull the whole thing together and have something that would be the co-ordinating force to cut through the planning red tape and, above all, draw in private money.

In Leeds, we now have had Government grants of £51.5 million, and we are drawing in another £317 million of private money. I could go on about other areas as well. Regardless of what the Robson report says, the managing director of Nissan said:

"The achievements of TWDC"—

the Tyne and Wear development corporation—

"in such a short space of time are nothing short of phenomenal. It has done a power of good for the image and the credibility of the region"—

not only the particular site but the region—

"in attracting 'blue chip' companies of real quality to Tyne and Wear. This not only enhances the stature of the area but it bodes well for its future prosperity."

Even our former colleague, now Sir Ian Wrigglesworth —I do not know whether he was speaking for the Liberal Democrats or as a business man—said:

"I am convinced that a considerable contribution to resisting the recession has been made by the work of the Tyne and Wear and Teesside UDCs and I think we can draw lessons on how to manage urban development from them . . . The corporations have made a dramatic impact on the areas they cover. They have been an enormous success."

Anybody who goes there can see that success.

The Government have offered hope to no-hope areas, created opportunities to tap the potential that is there and —above all—stopped the slide of decline and the insidious deterioration that had been going on year after year, decade after decade. We have produced partnerships of mutual benefit, involving city councils, the private sector, universities and voluntary bodies. That to me is a great achievement.

The tragedy is that Opposition Members, such as the right hon. Member for Gorton, have never acknowledged that there has been any achievement. They want to go back and perpetuate a system that was failing the inner cities of this country. The Government have more to boast about.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are just about to enter the ten-minute rule period. May I say to new hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye that the digital clock will flash when they have 30 seconds to go?

6 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I welcome the Labour party motion, and I shall be advising my colleagues to vote in favour of it tonight. It is true that the motion does not go much farther than reiterating points that have been made several times in the past, but then as long as the Government fail to recognise the importance of the points, it is up to us those of us on the Opposition Benches to reiterate them until the Government are forced to change their policies.

Let there be no doubt that the Government's urban and housing policies have failed, and are still failing. The Government's recent study makes it clear that urban deprivation and decay in the core of our inner cities has worsened throughout the 1980s despite all of the resources that the Government have tried to pour into them. That has happened because of the Government's pathological hatred of local government and their ability to ignore local authorities and communities, instead of working in partnership with them.

Inner cities face many problems—crime, vandalism, low standards of health and education, high levels of unemployment and many more—but if one aspect of our society lies at the root of all of the problems, it must be housing. Let us consider for a moment the effects of housing on health standards. Inadequate and poorly designed housing can often be both damp and cold. There may be problems caused by asbestos, insect infestation, radon gas, poor sanitation, poor lighting, the use of shared amenities and overcrowding. On the other hand, problems may be caused by living alone without normal social contacts.

We must consider other effects besides the health effects of poor housing. Residents in HMOs—houses in multiple occupation—are 10 times more likely to die in a fire than the average resident. More than half of the walls in newly completed houses fail to meet the Building Research Establishment's recommended standards for noise transmission between buildings.

Meanwhile, 72 per cent. of families in bed and breakfast accommodation in London have no access to safe play

areas for their children. Is it any surprise that some children grow up alienated from society, and feeling that they have been given none of the opportunities open to their contemporaries to make the most of their own lives?

What is the Government's answer? Since 1989-90, there has been a 42 per cent. decrease in funding for new special needs housing. Investment in social housing is set to fall by £1 billion in the next few years. The level of grants to housing associations has fallen and is still falling. Far from providing more affordable rented homes, the Government have done their best to reduce the number by their rent-to-mortgage scheme. The scheme can only be described as a farcical failure. It is reported today by the Association of London Authorities that just seven out of 650,000 council homes in the capital had been purchased under the scheme—precisely 0.001 per cent.

What of the Minister's other great initiative, the White Paper on homelessness? It has now been almost universally rejected, particularly those aspects which deal with the reform of homelessness legislation. On several occasions, the Minister has assured us that the responses to his consultation paper have been varied and have covered a wide spectrum. I wonder whether he will answer today one specific question. How many of the responses have supported the proposals in the paper which cover the reform of the homelessness legislation, as opposed to those proposals which cover necessary improvements in the advice network?

What can and should be done in place of the failing efforts of the Government? The Liberal Democrats believe that our country needs 100,000 new units of social housing each year for the next five years. Interestingly, a recent briefing paper from Shelter produced precisely the same figure.

How are we to achieve that? Part of the answer, at least, has to be to tackle the problem of empty homes, and I want that to take up a large part of my limited time tonight. I feel that it is a very important subject which has not so far been tackled by either of the larger parties properly. I am talking not just about the widely recognised scandal of empty Government-owned properties—appalling though that is—but of empty properties in all sectors.

In the context of empty Government-owned properties, it may be of interest to the House that I recently discovered why those properties are being left empty. Apparently, a senior officer was asked recently whether he would be prepared to accept young couples into some of the married accommodation in some of his empty sites. He answered that that would be impossible while any soldiers were housed there because some of the young couples who moved in might later split up and divorce, and that would be a bad example for our "young lads". So that is it. The Government waste millions of pounds a year keeping Ministry of Defence properties empty to save our poor innocent soldiers from being contaminated by the knowledge that couples sometimes split up and get divorced. What world do those people live in?

It is not just Government-owned properties which are empty. Since 1990, there has been a sudden jump in the previously gradual upward trend in the number of empty properties in England. Each year since then, the number has risen by an extra 50,000 empty homes and that is a tragic waste. There are now also huge numbers of empty commercial properties, many of which will never again be put to commercial use. Here I come to a proposal for the Minister which I hope he will get his civil servants to work on seriously. It could, I believe, lead to tens—if not hundreds—of thousands of new affordable properties being made available.

I have in the past praised the "flats over shops" initiative, and I believe that it is still worth while, at least in principle. However, it has no doubt hit a serious problem, in that many landlords believe that it is better to hang on to an empty property that has planning permission for commercial use than to allow it to lose that permission by being converted into residential accommodation. That is done in the hope that, at some point in the future, an upturn in the economy will give the property back the commercial value it once had.

The Minister should investigate the possibility of overcoming that reluctance on the part of landlords by allowing some sort of retained commercial-use permission. One might call it a "return ticket" type of conversion to residential accommodation. It is, of course, only a part of the answer that the Liberal Democrats would propose to the problems of housing and urban areas. I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the House will agree that it is better to use the short time available to me to try to take policy one step further than simply to repeat the points that I and others have had to make all too often in the past, or to go in for the sort of rant that we heard from both Front-Bench spokesmen earlier.

I offer the Minister a free suggestion. Be brave, take the flats over shops initiative forward and allow some sort of dual use permission. Who knows? The Minister may go down in history as someone who succeeded in helping, rather than harming, the homeless.

6.8 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): The terms of the Opposition motion best describe what the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) would otherwise have said with his usual venom.

The first line of the Opposition motion states that the Government's urban policies have failed. That line demonstrates that the Opposition have no conception of what urban regeneration is all about, because one cannot judge the success or failure of such regeneration inside 30 years. Examples from all over the world confirm that it takes decades to assess the success of regeneration. The Opposition, however, know better than anyone else and they have concluded that our policy has failed.

The Opposition motion refers to our "doctrinaire solutions"—what gall, what spleen from the Labour party. That party got me into politics because I was so furious at the way in which it used its doctrinaire policies to destroy jobs in Hackney, where I worked as a volunteer lawyer. A local factory was closed and 18 delightful Bangladeshi people lost their jobs because it was considered that their boss, a member of their family, was paying them a few pennies too little. Those people told me, with tears in their eyes, that they had been paid 500 per cent. more than they were paid in Bangladesh. They were delighted with such money, but they lost their jobs because of Labour party inflexibility.

The Opposition motion also claims that our policies have resulted in cuts in urban and housing programmes. If we cut our regeneration budget by even 500 per cent., it would still beat by a mile what the Labour party spent on urban regeneration during the 1970s. Then, it spent £25 million a year; last year, the Conservative Government

[Mr. Hartley Booth]

spent £4 billion. If that amount is added to all the money spent on inner cities, the aggregate sum increases to £10 billion. So much for the Conservative Government cutting budgets.

Mr. Straw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Booth: My speech is subject to the 10-minute limit, so I cannot give way.

If the Opposition are seriously suggesting that we have wasted money, what about the £3 billion we have devoted to attracting urban investment, which is part of the geared £13 billion extra commercial investment in our cities? According to the Opposition motion, the Government have also undermined voluntary action towards urban regeneration, but we are the party of voluntary action. I used to chair the British Urban Regeneration Association. It has 500 members, many of them voluntary organisations that were established in the 1980s and which continue to thrive.

According to the Opposition motion we have reinforced a dependency culture. That is rich from the Labour party, which created that culture in the first place. The motion also calls for

"the phased release of capital receipts".

We have heard a lot about that from Opposition Members today. Those receipts are already released, so that is another nonsense in the Opposition motion.

The Government's amendment, in contrast, is sensible and factual. It deserves the support of the House. Although the Conservative Government are not doctrinaire, we do adhere to one doctrine, because the Conservative party helps all our people, regardless of background. That is clear from the urban regeneration of Albert docks in Liverpool, which has already been mentioned, Swansea docks, housing in Kirklees and the Ivory house development in docklands. All those regeneration schemes were undertaken in Labour authorities. Time after time, the Conservative Government's urban policies have helped various Labour authority areas with demonstrable fairness.

Housing policy is a matrix of many policies, although we have not heard much about the environment, jobs, health or education, let alone about crime or culture. We have heard a lot, however, about local government and housing.

I want to give the picture from around Britain. I want health promotion and education to be part of urban regeneration policy. Recently I visited Battersea technology college. When the school numbers fell as a result of a crisis from 1,500 to just 350, what did we do? Did we close it and forget about that sad school? Not at all. We injected £2.4 million and, thank goodness, it is now pulling out of its crisis.

The burglary rate has fallen by 16 per cent. in the past year, thanks to excellent law enforcement in the inner cities. The cultural aspects of urban regeneration in inner cities was recognised recently with certain appointments to the Department of the Environment. I commend the recent quality of life initiative.

We need no lectures on local government. In Wandsworth, for example, £4 per head is spent on cleaning the streets, which are cleaner than those across the border in Lambeth. In Lambeth, it costs £28 per head to keep the streets a lot dirtier than they are in Wandsworth.

The Labour party calls for more responsibilities to be given to local authorities, but does it want those responsibilities to be given to authorities such as Lambeth or to those such as Wandsworth?

We do not need to rehearse all the excellent statistics that prove how we achieved great things in the 1980s, especially as they were rehearsed in the debate on 25 March. It would be excellent if more could be done to extend the success of our efforts to motivate people. We have sought to increase motivation in schools through the school truancy initiative. I hope that we will not hurt adult education through our job seeker's allowance.

We have attracted much investment to the inner cities, but we need to do more. Hon. Members have talked about the benefit-poverty trap. There are 10,000 people in that trap at the moment, which is far too many, but the figure does not warrant the casual criticisms that we have heard today from Opposition Members. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ten thousand?"] That figure was quoted in a letter that I received this morning from the Department of Social Security.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): It is the page number.

Mr. Booth: I will show that letter to anyone who wants to see it.

We must tackle the problems created by the black economy, because people who do not pay tax do not pay towards their civic responsibilities. Thank goodness, our policy of low taxation in the corporate sector has tackled that problem. It has brought people out of the woodwork because it is not too sensible to risk prison when taxation is so low.

We need to provide more money for housing swaps and renovations. On my shopping list, motivation should be at the top of our policy agenda. A strategy on health should also be incorporated in the urban regeneration policy adopted by Ministers. Crime prevention should be considered in a new way and—*[Interruption.]* If I can just make myself heard above the chattering from the Opposition—[HON. MEMBERS: "Time's up."] We need new firearms legislation. We also need to amend our transport policy to allow heavy lorries to travel at staggered times during the day.

We need to allow and empower people to renovate voids and we need more of the same successful policies for all our people—successful policy bricks made without straw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.18 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to make my maiden speech on such an important issue.

First, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Jo Richardson. Jo was greatly admired and warmly loved. She is sorely missed by many people, both in the House and in Barking. Thousands of people in Barking knew, respected and loved Jo and felt that the quality of their lives had been enhanced by her, through either her friendship or her actions on their behalf.

Jo's interests were wide-ranging, but she will probably be best remembered for her commitment to women's rights. Working with women in Barking, she helped to create a well woman's clinic and a women's refuge. In the

House, she piloted legislation protecting women against domestic violence and consistently led the campaign to defend the Abortion Act 1967. But, in Jo's words,

"All issues are women's issues. There is no such thing as a woman's issue. I believe that women should have a voice in everything. That is not only just, but our country will be the better for it."

The subject of today's debate—housing—is vital in Barking. Barking's housing is a lasting tribute and legacy to Labour's successful public housing policies—good council homes, mostly in cottage estates, at affordable rents, built as homes for heroes after the first world war. Later, as Ford expanded into the biggest urban industrial complex, employing more than 30,000 people at its height, the London county council and the Greater London council built decent homes for those who worked in the Ford factories. It was an effective public-private partnership that worked and delivered many years ago.

When Barking and Dagenham council took over the GLC stock, it achieved important social objectives by inheriting such a large stock. Young people grew up, married, and were allocated a flat in one of the few high-rise blocks. They stayed there for three to five years and were then transferred to a home with a garden, which was appropriate for families with young children. The flexibility of a large stock meant that Barking had stable, strong and mixed communities, with great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children living close by and supporting each other in decent homes at a price which they could afford. That is a culture not of dependency but of opportunity. It is not a weak community; it is a strong community.

During the 1980s, a third of the council's homes were bought by tenants, but, at the same time, council house building virtually stopped because of Government restrictions. So young couples can no longer look forward to a house with a garden; the stability of the community is threatened; opportunity for individuals is constrained; homelessness, even there, has doubled; vandalism and crime have spread as children cope with living in high-rise blocks; and racism is on the increase as white families look for a scapegoat to blame for the lack of a decent home.

The Government's dogmatic and ideological loathing of council housing has created a social and economic disaster for our urban communities. New council house building has virtually stopped. Spending has fallen by a staggering 95 per cent. since 1979. In London, only 63 new council homes are being built this year. So of course homelessness has grown. It has caused misery and locked families into a downward spiral of dependency, and made it more difficult for localities to compete for inward investment.

The Government have also forced up social housing rents, with the result that the number of people on housing benefit has almost tripled in 15 years, despite 49 separate changes to the housing benefit system, mainly aimed at cutting the benefits bill. Far from freeing people from dependency, the Government have forced them into dependency. Far from increasing individual choice, families cannot take opportunities to work because, with low-paid jobs, they cannot afford the rent. Far from creating social cohesion, the Government are allowing ghettos to develop in both council and housing association housing. Far from reducing public spending, there has been a staggering growth in the housing benefit budget. Far from helping in the fight against inflation, the Government have fuelled inflation with high rent increases. The economics of their policy isYet the economics of the madhouse. They have switched spending from subsidising the building of homes to subsidising rents—from investment to consumption.

The link between housing and urban regeneration in that regard is ironic. In housing, we should invest more in bricks and mortar, yet the Government do not. In urban regeneration, we should invest more in people, yet the Government do not. The gap between the rich and the poor is wider today than it has been for more than 100 years. Joblessness, homelessness, poverty, crime, decay and dereliction in our cities are there for all to see. Those are not the signs of a society at peace with itself.

What has gone wrong? The regeneration of our urban areas is a difficult and complex part of public policy. Yet it, more than most, has been subject to ministerial whim, short-termism and political gimmickry. The Government have had CATs, HATs, UDCs, enterprise zones, garden festivals and task forces. They have been through city grant, city challenge and now the single regeneration budget. The constant change in an area of public policy where consistency is vital shows that political vanity has triumphed over public interest.

Urban regeneration is a long-term project and is vital for a healthy society, yet, for the sake of 20 seconds of prime television time for a here today, gone tomorrow, Tory politician, the Government are prepared to let urban deprivation and social division become institutionalised.

Furthermore, urban regeneration will never work if the Government give with one hand and then take back much more with the other. Their review of urban programmes documents the success of a wide range of urban programme projects. But if local authority spending is cut, housing investment is slashed or section ll funding destroyed, the impact of urban regeneration spending will inevitably be lost in bigger cuts elsewhere. It is obvious.

Even in their own terms, trickle-down policies do not work. Canary wharf provides a potent visual reminder of that. We shall regenerate our urban areas only if we build from the bottom up. We need partnerships, not patronage —partnerships with people who live in the areas as well as with businesses that work in the areas. That depends on recreating strong, independent local government and really decentralising power, resources and decision-making to localities. They should not be run from Whitehall.

If localities are to be successful, they need civic leadership to promote the locality, argue for resources, seek inward investment, and foster civic pride and identity. Yet 15 years' worth of legislation has undermined that civic leadership. In London, civic leadership has been abolished. Without it, we shall be unable to create the partnerships that are essential to regenerate our urban areas. It means less power to Ministers; allowing diversity and experiments; and tolerating, not destroying, opposition. In London, it means creating a strategic and democratic voice for the capital.

In Barking, we have the people—nearly one in six are out of work. We have the land, with 800 acres on the east Thames corridor. What we lack is the freedom and opportunity to act and facilitate change.

When Jo Richardson made her maiden speech 20 years ago, she talked about exactly the same issues that I have raised today. What an indictment. We cannot afford to throw away the future for our children. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past 15 years.

6.28 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate. I declare an interest as the chairman of a small private sector housing company.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) on the speech that she has just delivered to the House. She arrives in the House with a reputation as a formidable, determined and hard-working lady with passionate, sincerely held views. In that respect, she is identical to her predecessor. The whole House has been impressed by the way in which she commanded its attention, and we look forward to hearing from her on many occasions in the future. We wish her very many happy and successful years in the House.

The speech of the hon. Lady was in sharp contrast to that of her hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), which was depressingly familiar. There was an unfortunate slur in the way in which he sought to denigrate the whole of the Government's inner-city industry programme. It was not simply a slur on the Government, as we would expect from the hon. Gentleman; more importantly, it was a slur on the many people in the voluntary organisations, the local authorities and the businesses trying to get started and to build up the inner-city areas who have put in so much time and effort to regenerate their areas. The way in which the hon. Gentleman treated them was a gratuitous insult.

Perhaps we should not have expected more, because we know that the hon. Member for Blackburn has been closely associated with the preparation of the leadership document for the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and it is astonishing that in 20 points for revival—set out, not just as 20 of many, but as the 20 points for revival—urban regeneration and housing are not mentioned once. The only time that housing is mentioned is on page 15 of a 20-page document, where it merits one line of comment. Homelessness merits half a line of comment. That is a pretty sad indictment of the way in which the Labour party views that issue.

If we are considering a motion which seeks to criticise the Government, we need to establish in what way the Government are being criticised. They certainly cannot be criticised for a decline in the number of houses in this country by comparison with 15 years ago—there are nearly 2.5 million more houses in this country than there were then. They also cannot be criticised for a worsening in the quality of that housing, because we know from the housing conditions survey that the quality of housing is higher than it has been in the country's history.

A report said that one in 13 houses were sub-standard, but we know that economic revival would return many to good condition. People have put off making repairs. People are buying houses again and, as the market becomes more vibrant, many repairs will be carried out.

In the brief moments allowed to me, I shall concentrate on the future. We need to do more about rehabilitation. Figures are bandied about to the effect that 100,000, 150,000 or even 200,000 houses need to be built in this country each year, but we need to do more to bring back into use the 850,000 houses which are standing empty, and to rehabilite those houses which are occupied but which are not of the standard we want. Progress is being made in that respect already.

The Government must take the lead, and they have done so by cracking down on those Departments, such as the Ministry of Defence, that have not made good enough use of their property. Further action needs to be taken in many areas, for example, by local authorities. I make a specific case in relation to empty police houses. If one's name is on a waiting list, there is nothing more galling than to find that two police houses in one's village or community are boarded up, overgrown and gradually falling into dereliction, as is happening in too many regions.

Derbyshire, the area in which my constituency lies, has the worst record in the country in this respect. Gradually, after much pressure from the Labour housing chairman of High Peak borough council and myself, action has begun to try to put that issue right, helped a great deal by the task force set up in the Department of the Environment.

Labour local authorities which allow their houses to stand empty must be forced to bring them back into use. They would be better advised not to speak about being allowed to spend their capital receipts, but to do more to collect the rents that are already due and are waiting to be collected.

The bulk of the problem of empty houses lies, not in the public sector, but in the private sector. There have been many welcome initiatives, such as the use of housing associations as managing agents, and the "flats above shops" initiative, but we need to go further.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) speak about bringing office space into use. That is not a new Liberal party policy; it is a well-established Hendry policy, which has been announced in press releases in the House, and on which my right hon. Friend the Minister has been lobbied endlessly at briefing meetings, dinners and so on.

If the Minister looks, he will see that in almost every speech on housing that I have made in the House in the past two years I have spoken about trying to make better use of empty commercial space. I am delighted that the Liberals have converted to that policy, and I hope that they will support it.

Mr. Rendel *rose—*

Mr. Hendry: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way, but I am more than happy to discuss the matter with him later.

We need to do more to bring empty private housing stock back into use. For example, if one has an empty flat above a shop, it is wrong that one should obtain a council tax rebate on that property. We should send out a clear message that that is socially undesirable and therefore, not only should one not obtain a rebate, but one should perhaps be surcharged. If a flat is owned by a family who are trying to sell it after someone has died, that may be different, but, especially if the flat is commercially owned, owners should be penalised if they are doing a disservice to the community in which they operate and work.

We also need to consider new build. In terms of public sector new build, we are on target for the commitment that we made two years ago—indeed, we are well beyond it. In the election manifesto we promised 153,000 new housing association houses, and I believe that we shall exceed 171,000 over a three-year period.

We should look to housing associations to be more imaginative. For example, we should consider making housing association grant available to private developers.

We should take a portion of a housing association's grant and ask private sector developers to bid for that grant, and find out how many houses they can build in competition with a housing association. That would make them operate more competitively and cost-effectively.

In considering grant levels, we also need to put pressure on the banks and to ask why they are willing to lend to all of us in the House at a mortgage rate that is lower than the rate at which they are willing to lend money to a housing association to build houses as a corporate organisation. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will find it possible to put pressure on the banks to show more flexibility in that respect.

We also need to encourage the housing associations to go further along the lines of the right to buy. That is one way in which they can generate more resources from their existing capital base, which can be ploughed back into housing and into building new capital support.

I strongly welcome the homelessness review that has been announced and carried out by the Department of the Environment. It goes to the core of a problem which we find in our constituencies, and which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State described so clearly. People in my constituency are fed up with waiting patiently on the housing list and being told that they are 20th or 30th this year and next year they may be 18th or 28th and will make the most fractional progress up the waiting list when people who they know are taking advantage of the rules are jumping straight to the head of the queue. That is an abuse which needs to be eradicated. I know from my constituency that 55 per cent. of the houses allocated by the local authority went to people who were not previously on the waiting list. That demonstrates the magnitude of the problem.

To my mind, housing is at the core of the issue of urban regeneration. We shall not solve the problems of urban regeneration until we have kicked out the Labour authorities that have ruined many of our city areas. *[Interruption.]* I say that because many of the people who have moved out of the cities, many of people who have moved their businesses out of the cities and many of the teachers who have moved out of the cities have left because they did not like the Labour rating policy or could not afford it, and did not like the policies, which were hostile to business, to individuals, to enterprise and to wealth creation. Until we have reversed that situation, we shall not get the policy straight.

At the same time, Conservative Members are right to pursue a policy of co-operation with those local authorities that wish to work constructively with the Government. That is what the Minister's policy is doing, and I wholly support the Government's amendment to the motion.

6.38 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am always delighted to see you take the Chair, because I always feel that I shall be called to speak when I see you come in.

The Government have created an appalling housing crisis—there can be no doubt about that. Government spending on housing was slashed by 53 per cent. between 1979 and 1992. In real terms, using 1992 prices, spending has decreased from £13 billion in 1979 to less than £6 billion in 1992. The Government this year are continuing to slash investment in rented housing, at a time when demand has never been as great. For example, local authority waiting lists in my constituency consisted of about 1,000 names in 1979. They now consist of more than 4,000.

The Three Rivers housing association in my constituency receives about 1,300 applications for help every year, but it can help only about 10 per cent. of applicants. Housing needs remain high, but the local authority is unable to respond satisfactorily as, in its enabling role, it cannot replace the loss of more than 4,000 properties in the past 12 years.

My local authority has demonstrated its enabling role by the provision of free land, its commitment to stop disposal as part of estate action, and its willingness to promote home improvement grants in the private sector. It will continue to adopt a positive approach to its enabling role, but that in itself will not meet the growing gap between housing need and provision. Durham city council's stock continues to deteriorate due to inadequate funding. Its on-going stock survey highlights the massive cost of repair, which was estimated to be about £66 million way back in 1985.

Only yesterday, I received a letter from a Mr. Weir, who does not live in my constituency. He is national chairman of the smaller builders group, which is attached to the Building Employers Confederation. The letter states:

"You will recall that some months ago I sent you a report 'English Homes—A National Asset?' . . . At the same time I wrote to the Prime Minister forwarding to him a copy of the same report . . . I am enclosing a letter which I have recently received from the Prime Minister setting down his comments and observations on the contents of the report and the Governmental (in)action."

The letter from the Prime Minister's office states:

"The Government realises the potential of the housing renewal/refurbishment sector and appreciates its worth in stimulating the construction industry generally. It feels that the best way to enhance the housing stock is to improve the conditions under which those who are unable to help themselves are able to do so, and to ensure that those who are in a position to better their properties, appreciate the benefits of doing so. The Government regularly reviews its policy in this respect and has taken note of the points raised by the report."

I read that time and time again to look for some clue that the Government would help the building industry. The letter, however, was a load of gobbledegook and meant nothing except that no help would be forthcoming.

In response to my local council's housing investment programme bid, the Government allocated £1.45 million to the council as an annual capital guideline. When capital receipts were taken into account, however, the allocation was reduced to £904,000. The Government give the impression that they allow local authorities to use capital receipts as extra spending for housing programmes, but that is false. Certain capital receipts are used and allowed to be spent, but an equivalent amount is deducted by the Government in the HIP settlement, which is the limit to which the council can borrow. Any other finances that are available for a meaningful capital programme must be financed by the council.

This year, the council eventually put together a programme of about £6.6 million, but had to contribute nearly £4 million from its own revenue, which it raised by average increases in rent of £3 a week last year and this year. Consequently, more and more tenants, both of local authorities and housing associations, are becoming totally dependent on housing benefit. Tenants who pay full rent

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end up subsidising those on benefit. Council tenants are paying the housing benefit of other tenants. That is immoral.

The position is much worse in housing association assured tenancies as, due to the cut in grant rates, nearly 50 per cent. of a development must be financed through the private market. That has led to outturn rents of about £60 to £70 for a three-bedroom house in the region. The only tenants who can afford to live in such accommodation are those on full housing benefit. Once they take a job and come off benefit, however, they cannot afford to pay the rent, so they cannot take a job. That is one of the reasons why Durham city council insists on housing associations building only flats and bungalows in an effort to keep outturn rents affordable.

If we bear in mind the fact that 60 to 70 per cent. of Durham's tenants receive benefits, it becomes clear that it is a major problem and worry, especially as there are rumours that the Government intend to review the housing benefit system. Many tenants are in the poverty trap and cannot take a job because they will not be able to afford the rent. That is a scandal.

According to the Department of the Environment's English house conditions survey, which was published in 1993, nearly 1.5 million homes are officially unfit to live in. Housing starts fell from about 272,000 in 1978 to 163,000 in 1992. Local authority new starts fell from about 79,500 to about 2,800. In the same period, housing association starts only rose from about 21,000 to 34,000. Those figures show the huge number of houses that have not been built in the past few years.

Local authorities hold about £6 billion in accumulated capital receipts, yet the Government will not allow them to build houses with the money. If local authorities used the money to build houses, that would help to revive the building industry, which shows little sign of upturn. In the past few years, about half a million building jobs have been lost. It is a scandal. Money is available to build houses and building workers are available to carry out the work, yet the Government, because of their dogmatic policies and hatred of local government, prevent houses from being built. They are prepared to see people without homes as homelessness increases day by day.

For misguided political reasons, the Government continue to be obsessed about promoting owner-occupation. The Housing Corporation is top-slicing more and more of its programme into initiatives to promote owner-occupation. The favourite schemes are the tenants incentive scheme and do-it-yourself shared ownership, where tenants are paid cash incentives to give up their tenancy and buy a property on the open market. The Government hope that those incentives—or bribes—will free properties for the poor and unemployed, but they will result in what I can only call "welfarisation". Tenants in work will move out, leaving behind welfare ghettoes of tenants who are unemployed and entirely dependent on benefits, which will damage the social fabric of local communities. Let us make no mistake—that is happening in my constituency, and I suspect in every other constituency.

There is a clear demand and need for affordable rented accommodation, but due to political dogma the Government will not accept that local authorities are the best vehicle to provide that much-needed commodity. The level of homelessness is one result of appalling Government policies. The Government seek to add ridiculous proposals to homeless legislation. Those proposals are nailed on the back of political dogma about single parents and families abusing homeless legislation. The sinister part of the proposal involves the suggestion that there should be central control of council waiting lists. That will take away any local control of council housing, and is the Government's ultimate aim.

There has never been a time when the need has been so great for major investment to be channelled towards the public sector. The housing stock that is left to my local authority is in need of substantial investment. The best properties on the best estates have been sold. The Government expect the private rented sector to come to the rescue, but that will never happen, especially in Durham because all private property is rented by students due to the expansion of the university.

The rents being charged in Durham in the private sector are said to be higher than those in the capital, London. The Government's ridiculous—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry, but I have to stem the hon. Gentleman's flow.

6.48 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): This is a broad subject with many interlinked themes, but the Opposition have chosen, at least so far, a narrow approach that is clearly driven more by party political expediency than a long-term housing vision. I propose, therefore, to concentrate on three issues that have not been properly covered.

The first involves the position of private leaseholders, an area of housing provision that is extremely important, especially in outer London, and which deserves attention. I will refer secondly to some problems to do with housing associations, and thirdly to the future of social housing. Although all three subjects are of considerable relevance to my constituency in outer London, they are relevant to many other areas too—housing problems are to be found across the nation.

The position of private leaseholders was immeasurably improved by the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. The right to enfranchisement corrected an archaic and contradictory element of the law. Previously, householders were seen to be owners, yet somehow less than owners. They paid the full price and regarded themselves as owners, but their ownership was limited because of their lack of control over much of the area in which their flats were located.

The 1993 Act was thus an excellent reform. It has gone down extremely well in many areas; it has improved the status of leaseholders; and it fulfilled a manifesto pledge. It will produce long-term benefits in urban housing provision.

Some unnecessary hurdles remain, notably in respect of tenure and the process of purchase. They give rise to the need for the early introduction of commonhold, specifically designed for this sort of housing. The Government are pledged to introducing it, and I say: the sooner the better. The further reform of housing law that it will bring about will help to extend ownership in practice and will aid transfer.

The right to enfranchisement still leaves many leaseholders outside, for a variety of reasons that I well understand. I am worried, however, about the development of two tiers of leaseholders. Most leaseholders who are not enfranchised enjoy good relations with their freeholders and with the management companies, but there are some worrying trends, and the worst examples clearly involve malpractice.

There is a tendency, too, for some companies to buy up freeholds purely as a means of gaining control of management companies and then using the latter as milch cows, sometimes even linked with insurance agencies and housing repair companies. That is because the freeholder has monopoly control over the provision of management company services and the choice of management company. Thus, despite some safeguards built into the law and governing service charges, leaseholders are not yet fully protected. There can be an uneven battle between the smooth management company operator and ordinary people, many of them elderly and at the lower end of home ownership.

Some management companies even disregard the law. I know of a number of such examples in my constituency. One company calls itself Manage, Administer and Supervise Ltd., and operates from a PO box in Southend. It has refused to answer perfectly valid inquiries about service charges and insurance submitted by constituents of mine.

When I took up the issue, the company's excuse was that it could not answer inquiries about service charges because the files were with its solicitor—an excuse which I suspect would not stand up well in a court of law, and which certainly goes against the intentions of Parliament as expressed in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1885. That Act obliges management companies to reveal simple facts when prompted by inquiries of this nature from leaseholders. This problem clearly needs dealing with.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the greatest culprits when it comes to service charges, the cost of lifts in flats and so on are socialist councils that refuse to accept their responsibility for people who have bought council houses?

Mr. Merchant: That is an interesting point, but my hon. Friend anticipates me—I was coming to it. Before I do, I should add that I believe that one answer to these problems of management companies is to consider legislating to give leaseholders some influence over which management company they end up with; perhaps some form of limited joint—to use a popular word—veto with freeholders when it comes to choosing a management company.

Moving now to my hon. Friend's point, I should like to discuss the problem for leaseholders whose freeholder is not a private organisation but a local authority. The leaseholders have probably exercised their right to buy, and in theory should thereafter enjoy the same sort of relationship with the local authority as they would have had with the private sector.

There are two problems in this connection: the first is the sheer size and power of the freeholder in this case; the second, the nature and size—again it is the operative factor—of the housing provided. With a private company, a leaseholder has in fact, if not in law, considerable bargaining power in the matter of high service charges and repairs, because the freeholder knows that he cannot press too hard on the leaseholder without upsetting the relationship and making it difficult to recover any money that the management company might spend on repairs. A local authority is in a much stronger position, and does not feel similarly restrained—that is the difference in fact, if not in law.

The problem in my constituency is even more complex. In the Bromley area, about one in four flats—2,000 altogether—previously owned by the local authority have been taken over by leaseholders who have exercised the right to buy. They are no longer local authority leaseholders, however, because the local authority has sold its entire housing stock to a housing association.

I strongly support both the right to buy and the transfer to housing associations, but they have created something of an anomaly. The housing association concerned, Broomleigh, is moving to levy severe service charges because of repairs, some of which the leaseholders argue are unnecessary. No leaseholder denies the duty that he has to pay service charges, but when leaseholders receive bills for more than £25,000—considerably more than the cost of buying their properties in the first place—something is obviously going wrong.

The practicalities of the matter have been handled rather badly by the housing association in question. There seems to have been a lack of judgment and sensitivity, not to mention some provocation. This problem needs dealing with; leaseholders need to be given some protection and some help—perhaps repurchase of their flats, if that is what they want, or perhaps the provision of grant money, not by increasing existing funds but taken from them. These people did, after all, go into purchase with their eyes open, but few of them were aware that such extreme service charges would be levied on them. I certainly hope that some means can be found to help them.

In my last few seconds, I should like to discuss social housing. I believe that the Opposition approach it from entirely the wrong angle. They look at it as something to be built on and expanded for its own sake, but surely we need to have a vision of a world in which social housing is no longer necessary because people have been provided with the means to acquire their own homes.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

6.58 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this debate.

The by-election in Bradford, South was caused by the tragic death of Bob Cryer, to whom many tributes have already been paid. Tonight, I should like to add my own. Bob became a national figure here and was respected as a good constituency Member, fighting for the people of Bradford, South and brilliantly using his knowledge of parliamentary procedure. His outside interests were as numerous as they were varied, ranging from the love of old cars to the formation of the Keighley-Worth valley railway. Bob was loved by his constituency party workers, and will be a sad loss not only to those of us in the Labour and trade union movement, but to all who cherish parliamentary democracy.

Bob Cryer and John Smith were two different types of people, but both were committed, as we all are on the

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Opposition Benches, to making a reality of our vision of a decent, fair society in which every individual has the opportunity to develop his or her potential to the maximum, within the framework of the communities that make up our society. The tributes to John Smith after his sad death show that the country respects principle and honour, but rejects arrogance and sleaze.

Bradford is the fourth largest metropolitan district, with a population of more than 490,000. The diversity of the district in geographical terms is as complex as the make-up of its population. Those of us who have lived and worked in Bradford all our lives would like to live nowhere else.

The proud heritage of the wool capital of the world has brought an international presence in our architecture—the magnificant Alhambra theatre, the area of Little Germany and the many imposing mills, such as Salts, Listers and Fosters, whose names mark the industrial heart of Bradford and which crafted a work force not frightened of a hard day's work, but always determined to receive a fair day's pay.

Last year in Bradford, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Independent Labour party, formed in Bradford as a result of the Manningham mill dispute. Its motto then could apply equally today—"The Liberals are the party that can't. The Tories are the party that won't. Labour is the party that will."

Within 15 minutes of leaving the city centre, one can be on the brooding moors of Haworth or without one's hat on Ilkley moor. In that heritage, I have a great pride, but I also have a great responsibility in representing the people of Bradford, South.

The people of Bradford want a decent caring Government to create an environment so that, when they are ill, they are treated at the point of need regardless of age or ability to pay. When they are old, they want to receive a pension that allows them a quality of life in keeping with the sacrifices that they have made over the years that they have contributed to Britain's well-being.

When they need housing, they want a choice of tenure. Home ownership is not the only option. In Bradford, 9,000 people require housing, and local authorities must be allowed to use their capital receipts to build affordable homes. When their children need educating, they want them to be educated in schools, colleges and universities that are well equipped, with motivated staff.

But most important of all, the people of Bradford want a Government who will sustain an economy that will develop and provide the opportunity for the dignity of work for all, so that people can make real choices in their lives. Bradford has to create 1,000 jobs a year just to stand still. Youth unemployment on our estates and in our ethnic minority communities is alarmingly high. Our manufacturing industry has been dramatically reduced, but in Bradford there is a great spirit of partnership, with all sectors fighting to protect and promote the district.

It is not uncommon—indeed, it is the norm—to see the trade unions and the chamber of commerce discussing economic and industrial objectives, or the university and religious groups campaigning together to ensure that Bradford retains its section 11 funding, which is so desperately needed. Will Departments and Ministers stop passing the buck for section 11 funding, and meet the need for jobs in Bradford and the schemes that require support? The council and the police work together to promote a safer city through a community safety board, and also combine to rid the city of drugs.

The resilience and strength of that partnership, however, has received some blows from the Government. There has been the loss of assisted area status with the decision that Folkestone is more deserving than Bradford, the loss of the urban programme and the cutting of Bradford's standard spending assessment, which resulted in a cut of £18.3 million and affected every family in the district because less could be spent on essential services. Yes, there has been city challenge and estate action, but those have had limited impact when measured against Bradford's needs.

A successful housing urban policy is easily achieved if one lets the democratically accountable local authorities work in partnership with other local agencies, deciding their own criteria for developing their district's future. The electorate of Bradford, South have put their trust in me and the Labour party. The British people should have their chance to put their trust in a Labour Government as soon as possible.

7.3 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on his excellent maiden speech and his tribute to his predecessor. The hon. Gentleman has clearly described to the House the advantages and heritage of his native city as well as its problems. I am sure that he will be a formidable fighter for Bradford and I wish him well. I am sure that he will be with us for many years.

I regret that I cannot be quite so complimentary about the speech made by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), which was long on words but short on content. His only policy was that, if one waves a magic wand and liberally sprinkles someone else's money, all urban problems will be resolved instantly and overnight. *[Interruption.]*

Coming as I do from one of the great northern cities of this land, I have to say that urban problems have taken a long time to develop—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but a number of private conversations seem to be going on—something which I have noticed previously. If hon. Members wish to engage in private conversations, there are plenty of places to do so outside the Chamber.

Mrs. Knight: Urban problems have developed over a considerable time. There are two main causes. First, housing has moved out of the centre of the cities to the large, formless municipal housing estates which have built up on the edge of those cities. That has been instrumental in breaking up old and traditional communities and new communities have not formed in those estates—estates which have also then been neglected by many of the local authorities.

The second cause is the second industrial revolution, which has resulted in companies and industries which previously occupied large tracts of land and employed a large number of people investing in machinery, technology, innovation and computerisation which in turn has resulted in far fewer people being required to produce the products of that company or that industry. Couple that

with the inclination and tendency of many companies to move to green-field sites and the consequence has been the urban problems that we now see.

Those problems must be studied and addressed in a number of ways. It is sad how local authorities have tended to stand by and watch rather than do something. In an earlier intervention, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) said that Sheffield council had done a lot, because it had given planning permission for the Meadowhall shopping complex. But that was the only thing it did for the acres of industrial derelict land in the city. The one and only thing it did was to pass planning permission for a shopping complex. It sat back and watched. It was the introduction of an urban development corporation into that city that resulted in land being developed, the dereliction being cleared, roads being built, new companies moving into new buildings and jobs being created.

However, many inner-city residents have been loyal to their inner-city neighbourhoods. They like them and they have received real benefits from the targeted programmes such as renovation grants for private housing and estate action for municipal housing.

The Robson report, to which Opposition Members have frequently referred, in its assessment of the impact of urban policies, said that those policies have positively addressed the problems of inner-city housing. It also said that programmes such as derelict land grants, enterprise zones and urban development corporations have been real attractions for industry to come back into urban areas and so resolve some of the urban problems that we have, bringing jobs to the citizens who live there.

The hon. Member for Blackburn was extraordinarily selective in his quotations from the Robson report. He neglected to say that the report showed that we had improved employment prospects for residents of urban areas by our urban policies. He neglected to say that the capital base schemes, the infrastructure projects, were praised in that report. He neglected to mention the Robson report's praise for city challenge and he neglected to say that the criticism of so many employers in the urban areas is that local authorities have done nothing about urban regeneration. They do not see local authorities as being important in that process. Those were as much the report's conclusions as the negative slant that the hon. Member for Blackburn chose to give it.

The next step forward in urban regeneration must be developing partnerships. City challenge has been a tremendous catalyst for bringing local businesses and organisations together and has resulted in imaginative developments of large areas. My constituency lies between two main cities—Nottingham and Derby. Both won city challenge with their imaginative bids. Being sandwiched between those two cities does not mean that Erewash is without urban problems, so we put together our own partnership—the Erewash partnership. The "we" in that is the local council, TEC, chambers of trade, business community and other major players in the area.

The partnership's strategic aim is to attract business and employment to Erewash. It may not be a city, but with two principal towns, it certainly has some of the urban problems mentioned today.

The partnership is looking to the single regeneration budget. The key to successful urban policy is creating and continuing an effective partnership between local people, the private sector, voluntary agencies, local authorities and central Government. The single regeneration budget has brought together a considerable number of programmes under one comprehensive and understandable heading.

I was concerned when Opposition Members mocked the amount of money in that budget. A sum of £1.4 billion is available for 1994-95, which is a considerable amount to spend on urban regeneration, and significant evidence of how seriously the Government pursue such policies. I hope that budget, coupled with the Urban Regeneration Agency, will result in 200 hectares of derelict land in Erewash being redeveloped soon.

There must be a leader in any partnership. I am a strong believer in a leading role for local businesses. Local authorities have a tendency to pepperpot too much on a plethora of small community initiatives—an advice shop here, a small project there. Although they may be commendable in their own right, that approach tends to overlook the overall objective of attracting businesses and companies to an area so that jobs are created. However important may be the social aspects, we must concentrate on job creation. A small social project might provide temporary comfort but it will not resolve the principal problem.

One aspect of urban policy not touched on yet is education. Just as industries and their requirements have changed, so have the skills needed in the new jobs that they provide. For too long, urban schools have not ensured that their pupils learn as much as they could. Leafy suburban schools have often done a much better jobs for their leafy suburban pupils than an inner-city school has done for its inner-city pupils.

For many years, I was an education committee member and often heard the statutory appeal of last resort from parents who wanted their children to attend a school other than that which the local authority had nominated. Invariably, those parents were from inner-city areas. They clearly knew why one school was preferable to another. They asked, "Why not publish the problems of one school and the benefits of another? That information should be made public." It is now.

Those urban problems are seriously addressed by Government policies and are benefiting the people who live in urban areas. Jobs are being created to provide local employment. That wins praise from the people who live there, and it should be praised also by the House.

7.14 pm

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): Birmingham has taken more initiatives than most authorities to secure its own economic prosperity. Its skill in securing European Community resources and its practice of working together with local industries means that, over the past 10 years, Birmingham has secured 20,000 jobs that would not otherwise exist. Despite that, the country's second-largest city still has more overcrowded housing, more children living in unsuitable accommodation and more people on income support than almost any other city in the country.

The Department of the Environment's recently published "Index of Local Conditions" shows that Birmingham is now the most deprived area outside London and the fifth most deprived area in the country. Against that background the Government, amazingly, have steadily reduced the resources available to the city. Despite the fact that only four other local authorities have worse

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overcrowding than Birmingham, its housing investment programme allocation dropped from £67 million to £62 million, then to £55 million and last year to £49 million —a fall of almost 27 per cent. over the past four years.

Although Birmingham is the fifth most deprived area in Britain, its revenue support grant settlement has decreased by almost 5 per cent. in real terms over the past two years. It is appalling enough that the Government have failed to secure for the people of this country the most basic necessities—a decent home, safe environment and secure and fulfilling employment. Worse still, they have failed to allocate resources fairly. When the Government's own figures show Birmingham to be the country's fifth most deprived area, why does the city rank only 21st in the amount of standard spending assessment per head? Will the Government reflect the conditions revealed by the local conditions index in the next revenue support grant settlement? I look forward to hearing the Minister's answer when he winds up.

Birmingham, like other authorities throughout the country, has been compelled to play the competition game to secure sufficient resources—and it has done so successfully. Under the single regeneration budget, the competitive approach to resource allocation will reach unbelievable heights. Areas of expenditure never previously subjected to competition will be included. Section 11 funding—the money available to help school children whose first language is not English—will be subject to competition. The Government have given no guarantee that all local authorities will receive money. It is likely that some currently in receipt of section 11 funds will get nothing and that children who are well served by that support will see their life chances diminish.

What kind of moral base is there to a Government who make children who need help with learning compete for funds against families who are inadequately housed? What economic sense does it make to compel small businesses to compete against training organisations? Why should the needy compete against the even more needy? If urban areas are to be economically vibrant and inner city communities are to be strong and secure, none of those people can afford to be losers—yet some of them will be. Statistics from the Library estimate that the total SRB budget will show a £150 million cut compared with urban spending seven years ago.

The Government talk a lot about partnership. Birmingham city council has played its part in regenerating our city, and local industry has played its part in trying to secure a sound economic base and employment future. Everyone in the city has been badly let down by a Government who have failed to play their part. Central Government cannot abdicate responsibility for adequately resourcing the needs of people who live in cities. The notion that the private sector can and will fill that gap proved to be wrong wherever it was tried.

Another aspect that I have mentioned in previous debates is the danger of the current over-emphasis on competing for resources. To compete successfully and to make the most of diminishing resources, cities concentrate the resources they win in the areas of greatest need, which are usually the inner cities. The result is that areas of our cities—usually the outer-ring areas such as the one that I represent—consistently lose out in the resource bid game.

City challenge, estate action and inner-city partnerships all concentrate resources in one area. However, there is a need outside that area. In the outer ring there is inadequately built post-war housing. There are children doomed to spend their childhoods at the top of a multi-storey block of flats. There are constituencies like mine, which has one of the largest proportions of pensioners but the lowest proportion of houses with central heating.

Outer-ring areas are all too often the areas with the least social cohesion. They do not have the history and background of a community living and sharing together. It is in those outer-ring areas that there is now the greatest increase in the levels of crime and unemployment. Yet those are the areas that will lose out in competitive bidding. As more resources are brought into the competitive bidding strategy under the SRB budget, those areas will lose out even more.

Apart from the self-evident fact that it is wrong to ignore the needs of the people in those areas, there are social consequences. People living in those areas of need, which lose out in the bidding process, look to the slightly more needy in the inner city and resentment grows. The Government's housing and urban policies pit the disadvantaged against the even more disadvantaged and people in need against those who are in even greater need. Our cities are crying out for policies that assess need and meet need and for a Government who are prepared to take their share of responsibility for ensuring that that happens. It is of great sadness to the people in the city of Birmingham that, under this Government, neither of those things is likely to happen.

7.21 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): If there is one thing that this debate has shown, it is that the Labour party does not know how to make it, but does know how to spend it. It is certainly a great deal more enthusiastic about spending it than about making it.

We had two important debates earlier this month. In the one on competitiveness on 17 June, just one Labour Member made a contribution of any significance. It was a whole day's debate. In a debate on 23 June on the opportunities for United Kingdom exporters, just two Labour Members contributed—the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). Those were crucial debates about the wealth-creating base of the economy which enables us to afford a decent housing policy. I should have liked to have seen as much enthusiasm for those debates as Labour Members are showing for this debate.

Having said that, I welcome the debate—although I welcome the Government's reasoned amendment rather more than the hysterical tone of the Opposition's motion. Housing does not always command the political priority that it deserves. I believe that poor housing is a cause of poverty and is caused by poverty. Preventive health, good education and effective policies on law and order depend crucially on the foundation of adequate housing.

I welcome the opportunity to debate those issues today, just as I welcome the opportunity to debate the Government's policies on urban regeneration. They have many spectacular successes to their credit. I think in particular of the town of Corby, which I had the privilege

of visiting. I saw what the Government's policy, working in partnership, had achieved for a community that had been decimated by the closure of its steel works some years ago.

A policy of urban regeneration requires active intervention by the Government, who have not been short on that. They have appointed as chairman of English Partnerships, the urban regeneration agency, my predecessor Lord Walker of Worcester—and they do not come more active than him. I am aware of the success that he intends to make of that organisation.

I want to highlight three aspects of Government policy and their impact on my constituency. The Government's amendment rightly stresses the role of the single regeneration budget—£1.4 billion in 1994-95, which is a not inconsiderable sum. That will have a vital role to play in urban areas throughout the country by better focusing 20 different Government programmes.

I make a special plea for my constituency. Worcester is a much misunderstood city. It is true that it enjoys a close relationship with its rural hinterland and it is proud of its links with the agricultural community in the rest of the county. However, Worcester is essentially urban with many typical inner-city problems. I am glad to say that the Government have recognised that on a number of occasions. They provided limited funding for the living-over-the-shop initiative, they provided generous sums for estate action grants, and recently they have provided money through the capital partnership system for energy efficiency and environmental projects on a large council estate at Dines Green. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Minister visited the estate last year and planted a tree.

There is still much more to do. Worcester has had a good unemployment record over the last year with a spectacular fall of 20 per cent. in the rate. However, the fact remains that in many areas of the city there are heavy concentrations of unemployment, especially in Tolladine, where almost half the unemployed of Worcester city reside. That is why the city council and others are joining together in a bid for funding under the single regeneration budget. They will make a presentation to the regional office for the west midlands on Friday.

It is a crucial project and I hope that it will attract the fullest support of the Department of the Environment. The partners are Worcester city council; the land owner, the British Rail Property Board; the training and enterprise council, HAWTEC; Hereford and Worcester county council and Worcester college of technology. The city council is engaged in an active search for a private sector developer to take forward the project.

The proposal is for the regeneration of the Tolladine goods yard for employment, training and community purposes. It is a 20-acre site that has not been developed so far because it requires new road access, a new foul sewer, clearance of dereliction and some decontamination. Overcoming those problems will unlock a site with both road and rail access—and I am especially glad about the rail access—capable of generating some 600 jobs in the office, industrial, warehousing and service sectors of the economy of my city.

The site is adjacent to the Tolladine housing estate, which has a lack of social facilities and high unemployment levels. The refurbishment of a Victorian railway building on the site as the "Tolladine Centre" would provide a social centre for young people and a facility to help local residents to gain job skills to match the needs of the new employers whom we are confident will be attracted to the site. The regeneration of the goods yard would also significantly improve the residents' physical environment.

That regeneration—and this is a point to which I think the Government will attach importance—will complement the work of the multi-agency Tolladine estate project, which already involves the local community in many different ways. It was set up to deal with the needs of the younger residents of the area for social facilities and job training. This initiative should attract my right hon. Friend's fullest support, which I hope will be forthcoming in due course.

I shall comment on the rough sleepers initiative. The majority of rough sleepers—although, heaven knows, not all of them—live that way through no fault of their own. The Government have recognised the need to assist them through the initiative. A minority of rough sleepers behave in an intimidating way or irresponsibly, but the majority demand our support. That has been forthcoming. Some £96 million of public funds was provided in the first phase of the initiative, providing 3,500 beds in London. In the second phase, running through to 1996, a further £86 million is being provided. A report by the director of Homeless Network to the all-party parliamentary group on homelessness and housing need said:

> "The Rough Sleepers Initiative has provided a route off the streets for literally thousands of people in Central London. However, it has not solved the problem. The RSI is not a preventative programme, and the number of people becoming street homeless continues unabated . . . The work will need to be taken forward and extended in Central London beyond 1996. There is no reason why the model could not be adapted elsewhere where there are sufficient concentrations of people sleeping rough and where the local voluntary sector infrastructure exists or could be built up."

I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Minister can guess what is coming next. I believe that Worcester is just one of those places. We have two admirable facilities for the homeless, the Maggs day centre and St. Paul's—a residential hostel—but they have to live from hand to mouth. Worcester is a compact city, but proportionally its problems are as great as those of the metropolis. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not only carry forward the initiative in central London, but extend it to other areas such as Worcester.

There has been a dramatic fall in the number of families living in temporary accommodation in Worcester city. We now have only 12 in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and 64 in temporary accommodation in total: the number has fallen from a peak of 189 about a year ago. That reduction is due to a combination of good management on the part of the Labour-controlled authority—I say that in all fairness: its housing stock void level is only 0.4 per cent., which compares very favourably with some London Labour-controlled authorities which have rates of over 9 per cent.—and Government policy, to which it is a tribute.

The policy of providing assured tenancies enabled better facilities to be found in temporary accommodation for the homeless, and the bringing forward of Housing Corporation funds created some 40 new tenancies in Worcester from a new housing association which made its own dramatic contribution to the reduction in the number of people living in temporary accommodation and registered homeless in my city.

I am glad to say, however, that Conservative-controlled Wychavon district council has gone a stage further and implemented a large-scale voluntary transfer of its stock to

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two brand-new housing associations, Droitwich Spa and Rural and Evesham and Pershore. Their exit from direct provision will—through effective privatisation of the stock and the debt that goes with it—enable them to repair and maintain that stock, and to provide 1,000 new units of social housing over the next 10 years. I attach particular importance to that. I urge my right hon. Friend to do all that he can to create more large-scale voluntary transfer schemes; I also urge Worcester city council to re-examine the possibility of doing the same in its area.

Three Government policies—the single regeneration budget, the rough sleepers initiative and the large-scale voluntary transfer programme—are correctly focused and are capable of bringing enormous benefits to my constituents. I commend the Government amendment to the House.

7.31 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My predecessor, Ron Leighton, who tragically died in February, was held in high regard by hon. Members on both sides of the House—as many have taken the trouble to tell me over the past three weeks—and also in the constituency. I worked with him first as a Labour party ward official, then as secretary of his constituency party and then during my 10 years as a member of Newham council. For the last four years I was leader of the council and saw at first hand the enormous volume of work that Ron took through, and the depth of his commitment to Newham: he was a tireless and determined advocate for the borough.

Ron took a particular interest in employment matters, and was deeply concerned about youth unemployment. He chaired the Select Committee on Employment for some years, and was responsible for a number of key reports. I particularly remember the Committee's investigation of the employment effects of urban development corporations. The report concluded that there had been a wholly inadequate impact on local unemployment in UDC areas. It was a landmark, responsible—in docklands, at any rate—for a much more constructive approach on the part of the London Docklands development corporation, from which Newham has continued to benefit.

Ron was the first chair of the Newham needs campaign, which was set up to draw attention to the inadequacy of the revenue support grant settlement for Newham and to the fact that the council had £20 million less to spend on services than the Government's own calculations suggested was necessary to provide a standard level of service in the borough. Ron was determined to draw attention nationally to that anomaly, and he therefore persuaded the campaign to organise a rally in Trafalgar square on a bitterly cold Sunday afternoon last November. Most of us expected very few people to turn up, but it was a great tribute to Ron's energy and the esteem in which he was held in Newham that several hundred braved the cold to ensure that the borough's voice was heard, and a very effective demonstration was achieved.

Newham combines, to a unique extent, deprivation on one hand and the potential for regeneration on the other. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) pointed out, the Department of the Environment recently released its index of local conditions. Drawing on the 1991 census, it puts Newham in the No. 1 spot as the most deprived local authority area in the country. There is a massive need for regeneration, but there are also great grounds for optimism about the future.

We have energy and vitality, and, despite the problems—perhaps partly because of them—we have a community that works. I am among those who want Government policies that will nurture and support our communities instead of tearing them apart, as has happened so often in the past 15 years. We have large numbers of bright and energetic young people, many from families who arrived in this country from other parts of the world, now determined to build a better future for themselves and their families.

We also have vast areas of land close to central London, benefiting from excellent public transport links that are set to improve with the completion of the Jubilee line and—I hope—Crossrail and the channel tunnel high-speed link. Those vast areas—the docks, the gas works, the railway yards—are places where thousands of people used to make their livelihoods, and where we hope they will one day do so again.

As much as any area in the country, Newham needs successful urban regeneration, with investment in our housing and schools. But one key Government decision, which I understand is imminent, is critical to the regeneration of our area—the decision whether to allow the international passenger station at Stratford, on the route of the high-speed rail link to the channel tunnel, to go ahead.

In 1987, when I was chair of Newham council's planning committee, British Rail announced that it was considering Stratford as a station on the channel tunnel link. Since then, we have supported Stratford International. I find it extraordinary—given the Government's policy of using the high-speed link to promote development in east London—that, seven years on, there is still uncertainty about whether the station will receive the Government's support. The locations of the intermediate stations on the link are to be determined on the basis of regeneration, transport, environmental and commercial considerations. Stratford succeeds handsomely on all those criteria, but I wish to concentrate on the urban regeneration issues.

Within five miles of the Stratford site are 125,000 people without work—a quarter of all the unemployed people in London. Our ambition is for Stratford and the nearby Royal docks to be transformed into a major commercial centre providing employment for many of those people, and the direct link to Europe will enable that to happen.

When, in 1991, the then Secretary of State for Transport announced that the high-speed link would run through east London, he said that it was to bring economic regeneration to the area. In October 1991, he told the House:

"It is envisaged that the high-speed train from the channel tunnel to King's Cross will stop at Stratford".—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol.196, c.34 .]

Only with a station in east London will the regeneration benefits that were the reason for the choice of the eastern route be achieved. I think that hon. Members will understand why, nearly three years after those annoucements, we in Newham feel frustrated that uncertainty remains about the Stratford station. We hope that the Government will soon end that uncertainty with a firm commitment to Stratford.

The Government have invested heavily in east London, and valuable foundations have been laid. If they decided

now that there should only be a station on the M25, that would jeopardise all that investment. The reason is—the point has been made forcefully by the London planning advisory committee, speaking for all the London boroughs and the City—that if there were only such a station, it would suck development out of east London. We have seen that happen in a number of north American cities. Development would leapfrog east London, where it is so urgently needed and where the Government have provided some of the infrastructure for it to happen, and cluster around the M25, leaving inner east London to decline further and throw away the benefits of the investment made so far. There is overwhelming public support for the station in Stratford and throughout Europe.

One of the main conclustions of the report commissioned by the Department of the Environment is the importance of creating effective coalitions of "actors" within localities to achieve regeneration. I believe that Ministers will acknowledge that that has been achieved in Stratford. The Stratford promoter group includes about 15 public and private sector partners, including landowners, developers and construction companies, as well as public agencies such as the council, the university of East London and the London Docklands development corporation. They are all ready to go.

We do not ask for subsidy; we simply want a green light to press ahead with a project that will pay for itself, will give a good commercial return and will ensure that past Government investment in east London is not thrown away. More than that, the project gives us an opportunity of the kind that comes only once in a hundred years, to change the nature of east London for the better, for good. I urge the Government to make a clear and positive decision for Stratford station and, in east London as elsewhere, to allow the local authority to build the coalitions that will create the changes in our cities and the regeneration that we so desperately need.

7.40 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Croydon, Central): I am delighted to be able to congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on his maiden speech. Making one's maiden speech is a nerve-racking task which on this occasion was especially well done. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his praise of his predecessor, too.

The hon. Gentleman is a little more imaginative and broader in his approach to the task than one or two of his hon. Friends who have spoken. They seem to be running back to the same old difficulty, because their set answer to inner-city problems is for more money from the Government—from taxpayers—to be pumped in through local councils, even though those councils have often proved themselves to be absolute and utter failures.

Many local authorities can be, and have proved to be, catalysts—but in many urban areas, especially in inner London, councils have proved to be parasites on the community and have damaged accommodation as well as education opportunities and the environment. Yet the knee-jerk claim from Labour is always that they need more money to pour into that wastage.

Urban regeneration touches much more than housing; it is concerned with education, for example, and with better local services. It must be achieved at a reduced cost that will represent value for the taxpayer and the council tax payer. The Labour motion refers to "cuts", but successful authorities have often proved that they can manage within their budgets, trimming them in many areas so that they can expand in others.

Unfortunately, I was unable to be here at the beginning of the debate, but I understand that a couple of snide comments were made about Wandsworth; that is the sort of knee-jerk reaction that we would expect. It is time that Labour Members learnt from some of Wandsworth's successes in urban regeneration. In fact, Wandsworth has been so successful that I understand that the Department of the Environment has decided on a 23 per cent. cut in its standard spending assessment. Nevertheless, over the years, the council has managed to deal with the reduction in its grant from central Government relative to grants given to the rest of inner London, especially to inner-London Labour and Liberal-controlled authorities.

Examples can be given using what I would call the real facts—the total tax take. Comparisons between some of the boroughs illustrate the point that I am trying to make. By total tax take for a band D dwelling, I mean the local taxation minus its preceptors plus the total grant from Government. In broad terms, in the case of Wandsworth the figure is about £2,000 per dwelling. In Labour Lambeth, as it was at that stage, the figure was £3,000 per dwelling, and in Southwark the figure was similar. If Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Haringey are counted, the figure is £4,500. Considering what those councils do with the money, those figures represent not cuts but daylight robbery.

To take one example, revenue collection seems simple enough, yet those councils cannot do it competently. Lambeth, Southwark, Islington and Tower Hamlets seem unable to collect rents or council tax, and most of them cannot even collect the rubbish that people want to give away. Let us examine the actual cost per head. In Wandsworth, it is £11.14; in Lambeth, £26.54; and in Tower Hamlets, £28.77—and for a worse job. Some of that money could be spent elsewhere if the job were done efficiently, because revenues would increase as a result.

Let us consider the environment. Moving through Wandsworth towards Lambeth, Southwark and Tower Hamlets, one can see the demarcation point. On the Wandsworth side, the streets are clean, whereas on the Lambeth, Southwark and Tower Hamlets sides they are consistently filthy. The explanation lies not in the amount of other people's money thrown at the job but in the way in which the job is done. In Wandsworth, street sweeping costs £5.36 per head. To the best of my knowledge, Lambeth did not report the figure—perhaps there is no street sweeping in Lambeth. In Southwark, street sweeping costs £17.54 per head; in Tower Hamlets, it costs £15.84.

Refuse collection may seem a simple service, especially in an area such as Southwark, in which 86 per cent. of the properties were originally owned by the council and in which there are many tower blocks, where collection is simple. Yet in Wandsworth, collection costs £9.50 per head; in Lambeth, £26.66; and in Southwark £21.66. In Liberal Tower Hamlets, it costs £25.49. Those sums represent an abuse. The services should be organised using the abilities of the private sector. Wandsworth has brought in a new system, upgrading standards and going out to competitive tender again. It is setting higher standards because of imaginative use of the private sector, and costs have been reduced by a further 41 per cent.

In the housing sector, we hear the request that councils should do the work. One has only to tour places such as

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Southwark to see a council that had 86 per cent. of the properties in its hands yet made a diabolical and appalling mess until the Government leant on it to use new ideas. Even then, Southwark managed to bungle the job. When it was forced by compulsory competitive tendering to go out to tender for cutting grass and carrying out maintenance on the estates, the district was divided into three areas. One area went to the private sector, and that was leant on to prove that it could meet the standards; the other two areas went in house. The first report, after several months of the new in-house service, told tenants that they were being charged 100 per cent. of the fees while receiving less than 45 per cent. of the service.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The hon. Gentleman represents Croydon.

Sir Paul Beresford: We are talking about inner cities. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that that council does not have quite the same inner-city problems as many others do, and if we compare like with like there is a lesson to be learnt, if we want to learn it.

The Government offer the opportunity to be imaginative, to have choice, and to bring in the private sector. The private sector has proved that it can work with councils, if councils are co-operative. It has proved that it can make changes and improve the environment without wounding the pockets of those who have to pay.

Inner-city councils have a role, but it should be that of flexible enablers. It has been proved, especially in the inner cities, that Labour and Liberal councils cannot produce the results as providers. I hope that the Minister will reflect on the debate and recognise that, rather than the funds of councils being boosted, the squeeze should be put on them to be more imaginative and to provide the funds to the private sector—perhaps allowing the private sector to be directly involved, as are housing associations, and to bid competitively for housing association grant.

7.48 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I place on record my admiration for the excellent speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). In many ways, what he said about inner-city deprivation and housing problems is reflected in Sunderland, North. I have no doubt that I am not alone among Opposition Members in finding that the majority of problems that are brought to my office and surgeries involve housing. Dealing with those problems is becoming quite a major task. Approximately two days a week is spent dealing with those problems by a member of my staff.

I was not quite so pleased to hear the Secretary of State for the Environment bringing up the same old arguments about whether it was desirable to sell council houses. He accused Opposition Members, in effect, of being against people owning their properties. It is interesting to look at the results of the Government's policy on the sale of council houses. There is no problem now for anyone who wants to buy a house privately, whether it is a new dwelling or not. The only problem now for people involved in the business of buying a house is selling their existing premises, because the market has been flat for a long time. It is becoming increasingly obvious that there is a problem for those who, for various reasons, are unable to buy their own premises but who require decent, reasonably priced, rented accommodation.

The Government have stated that they want more private rented accommodation. They are very much in the minority in thinking that, because most people who have had the "privilege" of living in private rented accommodation have been only too pleased to get municipal housing with a decent landlord at the earliest opportunity. The Minister would do well to look at the history of housing policy. Even during periods of Conservative Governments, and especially during the period when the Conservative Government went under the name of the National Government in the 1930s, there were considerable house-building projects. Municipal housing was built because it was recognised that private landlords were not the answer. If they were not the answer in the 1930s, they will not be the answer now.

The Secretary of State cited the figure of 67 per cent. in relation to people who owned their own houses. That is excellent and no one argues against it. It would be nice if everyone who wanted to own their premises could do so. I for one would never be against what was once called the property-owning democracy, but the fact is that that has not come about. If 67 per cent. of the population own their houses, there must be another 33 per cent. who need to find some sort of rented accommodation.

As the councils have been stripped of the power to build houses as they are required, housing is approaching a crisis. I wonder whether Ministers are aware that many organisations have warned that we are approaching a crisis in the condition of much of our housing. I refer not only to rented accommodation but to owner-occupied accommodation. That crisis will occur because not enough resources have been put into housing.

In 1945, when everything was in short supply, a Labour Government took power and instigated a massive house-building programme which, to the credit of the Conservative Government who came to power in 1951, continued apace. That was a period when we made progress in the quality and availability of housing. We have now gone full circle and present Government policies are leading us into a crisis not just of homelessness but in the condition of property. There is also the problem of those who find life difficult because of the price of property. Not everyone is on some form of income support or housing benefit, and people find life difficult. The situation is probably worse now than it has been for the best part of this century.

One of the effects of the Government's policy of selling council houses may not have been foreseen and I have not heard it mentioned this evening. When municipal property is made available for tenants, the stock of housing available for those who require rented property is reduced. Those sales bring about another phenomenon—a brake on new private housing. People who have been living in council premises who want to buy a house and who are offered a house at a good price by the council will not buy new houses or owner-occupied houses. The knock-on effect has been a gradual reduction in the number of houses built and that problem is now coming home to roost.

I shall cite one or two figures from the National Federation of Housing Associations. I declare an interest here: I belong to the management committee of a rather unusual housing association which was set up in 1909 to provide houses for retiring miners—the Durham Aged

Miners' Homes Association. When coal miners retired, they had to find accommodation and there was not much about. Usually their home would be a couple of rooms in a grotty private landlord's domain, which was not satisfactory. As time went on and legislation changed, the organisation became a housing association. The association provides housing only for retired people or widows. I am sure that everyone here in the Chamber is aware that by the nature of things, not many people who are around retirement age are willing to buy property. There is not much use in buying a house at the age of 65 when one might not live long enough to pay for it so people do not bother.

According to the Housing Corporation, more pressure is now being put on to housing associations to build more houses for sale; a larger percentage of houses is supposed to be sold. I thought that the Government's policy was to use the housing associations, as they are always crowing, to provide low-cost accommodation for rent—social housing, which is getting harder to come by day by day.

The National Federation of Housing Associations states that, in its opinion, 120,000 homes should be

"produced each year to meet housing need in the social sector."

The present policies seem likely, by 1996-97, to produce 27,000 homes per year. We therefore have a continuous downward spiral and the problem will get worse.

This is not an argument about whether council houses or housing associations are best, or whether it is better for people to be able to buy their own houses. It is an argument about the Government's responsibility to provide decent homes for all their citizens. I believe that that is a fundamental right that anyone who lives in a democracy should expect, but it is not happening. We have heard all the jokes about cardboard boxes and about the Government's initiatives to deal with the homeless, but no progress is being made. There may be a marvellous flagship in London and fantastic progress may have been made in hostel provision, but such progress is not happening anywhere else. It is not happening where I live in the north-east; it has not reached that far yet. There is nothing unusual about that; it is what we have come to expect under the present regime.

What will happen? Will the Government wait until people riot about housing conditions? That has happened before. That is what we mean when we talk about inner-city deprivation. It is all very well for Conservative Members to say that we always ask for more resources. One does not have to be a brilliant financier to know that, if there is a problem of shortages, the only way in which to put that right is to allocate more resources.

Unfortunately, the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction has just left the Chamber. I tried unsuccessfully for 23 minutes this morning to elicit some information from his office. At the end of that Herculean task, I was fortunate enough to get an answerphone so I was at least able to leave a message, which has not yet been answered. If people who had a housing complaint met such a response from a local authority, of whichever colour, they would talk about bringing in the ombudsman. That is the service that a Member of Parliament can expect from a Department under this regime. I find it most objectionable. I am sorry that the Minister concerned has left the Chamber, but I am sure that he will read my remarks. If he makes investigations, he may find, among the seven different people to whom I talked, someone who can inform him about the true position—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

7.59 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I am proud to be able to declare an interest as a director of a house-building company.

I add my voice to those of my hon. Friends who have congratulated the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on his excellent and thoughtful maiden speech. Obviously, we shall not agree on everything about housing and urban policy, but it is important that he stressed the importance of reviving communities as part of urban policy.

It is important that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East was able to identify in Newham, as I am sure is possible in every other area of the country, urban and otherwise, exactly the kind of revived spirit on which, ultimately, successful urban policies, however financed and however generous in financial terms, depend. I remember that, in my maiden speech some seven years ago, I made precisely the point made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East. The difference between us is that I believe, as I shall—hopefully—demonstrate, that, in many parts of the country and in many of our inner areas, substantial progress has been made as a result of the Government's housing and urban policies.

I also happen to agree with the Government when they stress choice in housing between ownership, private renting and, of course, social provision, either by councils, or, especially recently, by housing associations. I support that because, by their actions over the past few years, the people of Britain appear to support it too. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that 67 per cent. of people in Britain nowadays are home owners, which is the highest figure in any country in Europe. That has risen significantly since 1979 from about 51 per cent. It is also significant that a large proportion—1.5 million—of households have moved away from state-controlled council housing and, indeed, 0.4 million households are no longer in the housing association sector.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Mr. Coombs: Let me finish the sentence and then I promise to give way. They have moved away from the housing association sector to take advantage of home ownership opportunities.

Mr. Winnick: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is no dispute between us on the question of people who want to buy? Obviously, if they wish to buy and become owner-occupiers, they have every right to do so and we would never discourage that in any way. The dispute was, of course, over the way in which council dwellings were to be sold or not. Does he also accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) pointed out, the remainder of people unable to buy for obvious reasons is about one third? Their wish is for affordable, rented and secure accommodation, which they are not likely to find in the private sector, where there is no security and where, as I was told at Question Time, the average rent is now well over £70 a week.

Mr. Coombs: I entirely accept that, with about 6 million households still in council accommodation, that may well fall because of the rent-to-mortgage scheme,

[Mr. Coombs]

which will affect 1.5 million people in the next few years, and that there are people in state-owned housing who want to ensure—it is our obligation to ensure—that it is run as efficiently and as properly as possible.

Equally, it is important that councils recognise their role as facilitators—as many are—in providing social housing. They would be in a better position to be able to do that if they concentrated on that kind of housing, rather than spreading themselves too widely and inefficiently, as has been the case up to now. Most local authorities, especially many Labour-controlled local authorities, have recognised that their future lies in being able to facilitate good housing in conjunction with the voluntary sector and the private sector. The Demos research group is a classic example of that, and I hope that the trend continues.

The other reason why I think that people are more likely to want to own their home is that, almost by definition, it gives them more control over the housing stock available than is the case for council house tenants. I find it most demeaning, in a sense, for my constituents—although not Conservative-controlled, the Wyre Forest district council has a relatively good record on housing management policy—to hear them saying "Mr. Coombs, I want a transfer to another part of Kidderminister or to another area, but, unfortunately, I cannot get it and I am stuck in the points system." If they were able to secure a direct stake in their council houses through ownership, or through housing associations by shared ownership, their ability to move would be greatly enhanced and that could only be to their good.

We have also heard of the other reason why people are moving away from council housing. In many areas—again I do not say all areas, not even on a party-political basis—which, generally, are controlled by the Labour party, there is an appalling record on rent arrears and empty houses. The classic example was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) when he compared the efficiency of Wandsworth with Lambeth and with Tower Hamlets. People want efficiency and, sadly, too often they do not get it.

In Birmingham, in the largest Labour-controlled local authority, which is near my constituency, some 900 houses are empty and unavailable for letting. It is significant that the tenants of the Castle Vale estate, a large 1950s-60s estate in the north-east of Birmingham, recently voted, on a democratic basis, to become a housing action trust, to move their management away from the council, precisely because of the poor management and inefficiency of the council.

It is also significant that, just before the tenants did so—as reported in *The Birmingham Post* only last year—the residents of a tower block on the Castle Vale estate received a letter from the council saying that it was very sorry but it was withdrawing their caretaker and that it hoped that the tenants, the majority of whom were elderly, would be able to maintain the standards of cleaning in communal areas to which they had been used. If that is an example of sensitive, good, reactive housing management, the people who are regarded as such are living in cloud cuckoo land.

People want to move and to take more control of their own destinies. The housing action trusts and the estate action programmes, which sometimes are a prelude to home ownership, are an extremely important part of housing policy.

An interesting document was recently produced by the National Federation of Housing Associations, which stated that 67 to 70 per cent. home ownership in the country is about our maximum, and it put forward many interesting ideas about how the housing market in the country will develop. When any party considers its housing policy, it ought to take cognisance of that. The NFHA estimates that, up to 2011, the number of households in the country will increase from 19 million to 22 million, that there will be a far larger number of single-parent households and a far larger number of single-adult households and that during that period the number of older men, as single households—45 to 64-year-old men—will increase by no less than 156 per cent. So we shall see a fragmentation of households, far more single households and, therefore, a need for a significantly different kind of more flexible housing stock and more flexible tenures than has been inherent in the past as a result, primarily, of a system of state-provided social housing.

Being in the housing business myself, to a certain extent, I have some first-hand experience of the recent recession in the housing market. Although it has had a number of adverse effects such as negative equity and, sadly, some repossessions, it has also given people a more realistic idea of the future of housing. People are no longer regarding house buying as an automatic investment, whereby one buys a house and the value rises by 20 per cent., for example, over the following two years to cover the transitional costs. I see no reason why, with the current low inflationary climate, with interest rates staying low, and with a gradual decrease in mortgage interest relief at source, we should not see a far more sustained and sustainable recovery in the housing market, which, at the same time, does not take the enormous amount of resources away from the productive economy as occurred in the past boom and, indeed, during the boom and busts under different Governments since 1970 and even before that.

Let me move on to the question of inner-city policy. It is helpful that the Government have rationalised many of the initiatives which have come forward from Government Departments. An enormous amount of money—some £4 billion—will be spent this year on inner-city initiatives. However, many initiatives need to be rationalised, and it is important that that will take place through the single regeneration budget and the Urban Regeneration Agency.

Successful inner-city policy has always been a question of partnership between the voluntary sector, local people, central and local government, and the private sector. One good example that is currently taking place, again in the west midlands, is Birmingham Heartlands. That sort of infrastructure investment needs a significant amount of financial backing, and it is happening in the way that I have just described.

As the hon. Member for Newham, North-East rightly pointed out, we will ultimately have sustainable recovery in inner-city areas only if people are given a direct investment in the future of those areas. That is why it is absolutely crucial that everything is done to promote, through grant-maintained schools, housing action trusts or neighbourhood groups, the sort of direct involvement in

local communities which people can have in order to promote the community spirit to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

As an example of that, I shall quote from a magazine that has been issued by the Building a Better Balsall Heath campaign. Balsall Heath is an inner-city area of Birmingham. I can remember going down its main street in 1981. It was riot torn—it was like Detroit a few years earlier. I can remember seeing cars on fire, people throwing stones, and so on. Since then, there has been—and I quote from *Respect*—

"a blooming miracle. The neighbourhood has been largely rebuilt. The community has become an example of multi-racial harmony to the rest of Britain. We can now expect the rest of the city to respect this achievement".

Balsall Heath had an appalling reputation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That was the "before" situation. I know that we are not allowed to show photographs but there it is. The "after" scenes are

"astonishingly and refreshingly different. The houses have been rebuilt. Parks adorn the area. Mosques and churches grace it. In the 1990s, the area has become strong and resilient. The community is chasing away the old problems and attracting fresh life and hope. People are now beginning to choose to live and invest in it."

That is what makes for good inner-city policy.

That example of what has happened in what was an unpromising area of Birmingham shows that if inner-city policy is done with the community, as most of our inner-city policies have been until now, and certainly in Balsall Heath, rather than imposed on it, it can be successful.

I shall briefly talk about housing associations and say why I feel that they have an important role to play in housing development over the next few years. I understand —certainly our amendment indicates this—that housing associations, over the past three years, have out-performed the targets that were set for them in 1992. What is more, they are expected to repeat that performance over the next three years.

First, as the National Federation of Housing Associations said in its excellent report, "Working households, affordable housing and economic needs", housing associations will be increasingly important by providing flexibility in the housing market between ownership and renting, and the interface between them. Do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes will be seen as increasingly important in allowing people to get a step on the home ownership ladder.

Secondly, because housing associations are more local and much smaller, they are, intrinsically, more likely to be more efficient than the potentially bureaucratic council housing departments which they succeed. Indeed, housing associations are able to attract private capital where local authorities cannot—some £6 billion since 1988—and through BS5750, "A Tool for Improvement", which has been recommended to housing associations by the National Federation of Housing Associations, housing associations will continue to improve their efficiency in a way that is bound to be good for their tenants and shared owners.

Housing associations, compared to council housing, depoliticise the housing situation. In other words, because they are more local, they are less party political; and, because they are more practical, they are less easily manipulated by people who would like to make a political argument out of them. As a result, they address the problems of home ownership and reducing homelessness in a more effective way than council housing departments.

I should like to see many more large-scale voluntary transfers than are taking place. As I said, there are 6 million council house properties in this country. So far, only 123,000 of them have been the subject of voluntary transfers to housing associations. There is enormous scope for more transfers of that sort, which would underpin the facilitating role that local authorities should be taking in the future to make the country much more efficient in the way that it provides for its housing needs.

8.16 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): This debate is about the biggest change to have affected the country in the past 15 years—indeed, in any 15 years in history. The structural change—increasing social inequality—is of such a magnitude that it underlies every political debate, including today's challenge to the Government.

The problem is not peculiar to certain towns and cities in the north. Indeed, the census shows that in some respects the position has been getting worse more quickly in the south than in the north. The facts about the north are reasonably well known; those about the south are only beginning to be fully established. My constituency is a good example. Between 1989 and 1994, unemployment in Bristol, East grew by 96 per cent., compared with 51 per cent. in Britain as a whole. The exact extent of that increase —96 per cent.—ironically applied to places as far apart as Yeovil, Eltham and south-west Norfolk. They are not the most dramatic examples. The biggest increases of all in these five years have been in places like Guildford, Horsham, Newbury and north-west Surrey.

I shall concentrate not on the regional and national divide but on the divide which afflicts every city and town and which is turning our urban landscape into a depopulated inner city surrounded by a scatter of formally designated areas of dereliction, in which there are insecure and low-paid workers, and elderly and unemployed people, beleaguered by affluent fortresses—whether commerce and banking in the city centres, or the increasingly security-minded residential locations of business and professional elites on the periphery. There is what we might call the "Polo" factor—creating cities with holes in the middle.

Bristol city council has just published a report entitled "Poverty in Bristol". This is six years on from a similar report in 1988 and, dare I add, 56 years on from one of those classic surveys of poverty in the inter-war years, carried out by Herbert Tout in Bristol. It showed that, in 1938, there were fewer unemployed, a smaller percentage in poverty and certainly fewer homeless people than in the 1990s. The diet prescribed then for a needy family was, by modern standards, substantial and nutritious.

The Bristol city report deals with changes between the censuses of 1981 and 1991 and it found that poverty in the poorest areas has worsened. The areas are Lawrence Hill in my constituency, which is covered by the Bristol development corporation—one of those development corporations which the Government never boast about—parts of Ashley in the constituency of Bristol, West, Hartcliffe, Withywood and Knowle West in the

[Ms Jean Corston]

constituency of Bristol, South and Lawrence Weston, Southmead and Lockleaze in the constituency of Bristol, North-West.

On the 1991 measures of unemployment—free school meals, poll tax rebates, children in households with no earners or only one part-time earner, long-term illness and mortality among those under 65—those areas have the highest rate. In those areas, unemployment grew faster than elsewhere in the city, as did the substitution of part-time for full-time jobs. There were said to be "significant reductions in income".

In Lawrence Hill, 65 per cent. of households did not have a car and the growth of out-of-town shopping facilities increases the difficulty of transport for those populations. Bristol city council and local business people are determined to keep the city shopping centre alive. John Lewis has just announced that it is moving to an out-of-town site. That creates the problem of access to supermarkets and department stores for working people without cars, and that problem will get worse.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does the hon. Lady agree that John Lewis's decision was taken mainly because of the policy of the city council, which prevents cars in any number from getting into the city centre to shop in the original store? Is not it also an example of a planning decision, after John Lewis made it clear that it wished to stay in the city centre?

Ms Corston: John Lewis made it clear that it wished to go outside the city because there was a large shopping centre there where people shop with cars, and that was obviously more convenient. The problem is that if there is an inner city area where 65 per cent. of people have no access to a car, those people cannot go to those shops. That is a question for the policy makers which we must address.

In Lawrence Hill, Knowle West, Hartcliffe and Southmead, the number of school children eligible to receive free school meals is more than half or nearly half. In those areas, nearly half of all children were in households with no earners or only one part-time earner, usually a woman. That is a huge fraction of the local community, and poverty and unemployment are on such a scale that they crush the potentiality for local responsiveness.

Too many people have problems of eking out a livelihood. Short-term help from family and neighbours becomes difficult, and long-term support becomes impossible. Better-heeled professionals are becoming less likely to live in and serve those areas, and they also do not know that the areas exist. They are commuters, who drive to work and back along a few principal roads on which there are fewer and fewer facilities to tempt them to stop.

Local populations are becoming less of a mixture of people of every occupational class. For Bristol, the 1991 census shows that vividly, if roughly. There are wards such as Cotham and Clifton with nearly seven times as many non-manual as manual workers. At the other extreme are wards such as Lawrence Hill with only half as many non-manual as manual workers, and Filwood with as little as one fifth as many non-manual as manual workers.

If unemployment, part-time and casual forms of employment and extremely low incomes are becoming concentrated in certain areas, lack of access to affordable housing and other forms of property are following suit. There is a sharp divide between owner-occupiers and tenants, and the Government are penalising those who are paying rent.

Having reduced wages and benefits, the number unable to buy has increased and too little housing is being built to rent. Council housing rents have been forced to rise, and the poorest are being squeezed out of homes.

Earlier this week the National Federation of Housing Associations issued a revealing research report to which reference has been made by other hon. Members. The report makes a powerful case for much more affordable housing. It affirms that

"home ownership is near its limit"

and that

"private sector renting can't meet future needs".

The south-west is one of three regions singled out as being likely to experience a 20 per cent. increase in the number of new households during the next 15 years. The case is an economic one, providing a basis for fuller employment. The federation says

"affordable rents help people back to work".

The housing crisis in Bristol takes some of the forms familiar to other parts of the country. A National Housing Forum study, commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, was published today. One in 13 homes is officially unfit for human habitation, while one in six is in need of urgent repairs costing more than £1,000. It was estimated that a comprehensive programme to deal with the backlog would cost £34 billion.

The problem applies to all the areas highlighted in the Bristol city council's report on "Poverty in Bristol". Homelessness is the tip of a poor housing iceberg. In 1985-86 the number of homeless people officially registered was 994. By 1990, the figure had doubled and in 1993-94 it was 2,856. Of those, 1,477, or more than half, were accepted as priority cases by Bristol city council.

Those figures are of applicants to the council. Many more do not apply, and many homeless people do not believe that they are eligible for rehousing or do not believe they would be successful if they did apply. Reputable attempts have been made to estimate the real numbers of homeless, resulting in informed estimates of between 6,000 and 8,500 people.

The Select Committee report on homelessness stated that a key factor affecting homelessness is the availability of sufficient accommodation at affordable rents. In 1978-79, total rented accommodation declined overall by some 1.5 million units—20 per cent.—and the number of new homes built by housing authorities declined from 104,000 to 22,000.

The Government's consultation paper "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies" sets out proposals for the reform of homelessness legislation and new powers to prescribe local authority allocation policy. Bristol city council provided just one of 9,000 predominantly critical responses to that Government consultation paper. The council said:

"The proposals are not concerned with either housing provision or more effective services for homeless people. Rather, they appear to be concerned with redefining homelessness and directing homeless people away from permanent homes towards temporary and more expensive accommodation."

A family had to be literally "roofless" before qualifying for assistance, and it seems that assistance could be in some

very unsatisfactory forms of temporary accommodation. Old lorries, caravans and tents do not appear to be ruled out. Those are shades of third world shanty towns.

The consultation paper recommends greater use of private lettings. In Bristol, 45 per cent. of that sector of housing is unfit or in serious disrepair. Since public housing is hedged around with restrictions which prevent rebuilding, limit repairs and artificially raise existing rents, more people will be forced into sub-standard accommodation at rents which the National Federation of Housing Associations would undoubtedly describe as unaffordable.

Figures collected by Bristol city council show that average rents in private tenancies range from £87 a week for a two-bedroom flat to £134 a week for a four-bedroom flat, compared with an average weekly rent for a Bristol city tenancy of £35.

What is happening in Bristol applies to many other areas. Council rents have been and are being forced up and, while housing benefit fills the gap for some, the near-poor are faced with increases in the cost of living which are out of all proportion to those elsewhere in the economy. They are dragged down into poverty, which is now shared with the great majority of their neighbours.

Those matters may be attested to by any hon. Member from an inner city constituency. We have seen the consequences of the Government's policies. Children live in high-rise flats, which causes tension, and there is a lack of play space for children.

When one reads about and sees the kind of people who are classified as homeless in Bristol, one begins to evolve an infinitely more human and appealing picture than that evoked by the Prime Minister's black caricature of beggars in Bristol.

The Government's housing policy is more concerned with undermining the work and powers of local authorities than with the housing crisis. None the less, Bristol city council is striving to introduce a housing advice shop providing services to homeless applicants and a related homeless prevention service, a homeless-at-home scheme to enable applicants to be supported by relatives and friends, high-quality temporary accommodation to replace bed and breakfast, establish a Bristol common register to enable housing applicants to get the answers to all their questions in one place, create a Bristol housing partnership, offering joint planning and action with all housing associations in Bristol and other organisations, introduce a private sector leasing scheme for access to good standard private tenancies, set up housing associations as managing agent schemes to access privately owned lettings as alternatives to bed and breakfast and establish a Bristol special needs housing forum.

Within its powers, those are the imaginative things that Bristol city council is trying to do to solve the problem. It has the brains; what it needs is the money.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. About 45 minutes remain before the winding-up speeches. Four hon. Members hope to catch my eye and with a bit of co-operation I hope that all four will be successful.

8.30 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): It is inevitable that the debate has highlighted contrasting opinions on a number of Government programmes. I want to refer to one of them, the estate action programme. I can speak with experience because the programme is operating in Belle Isle North in my constituency. I also want to consider the programme in the context of my entire constituency and the city of Leeds.

The estate action programme in Belle Isle was extremely fortunate because it built on an earlier experiment to develop tenant participation, which was initiated through the city council. The success of that original tenant participation scheme owed a great deal to the then chairman of the housing committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). Those early experiments in tenant participation took place when he and I were public representatives for the same area of Hunslet and Belle Isle.

There is no doubt that that participation started well. A few enthusiasts committed themselves, as tenants, to work in Belle Isle. The estate action programme also offered accessibility to finance. The fact that money was available to develop the estate and to make the improvements that tenants wanted undoubtedly contributed to the major improvements made to homes in the area. The estate action programme is currently part way through in Belle Isle. In addition to internal improvements, a number of external improvements have been made. Anyone going through that estate can see the visible changes that have taken place. As well as that, the estate action programme has had a notable effect on the community. There are now far more community participants and they work with a good spirit and in the knowledge that progress will be made.

The scheme has been a considerable success because it is based on a three-way partnership. The Government, through the estate action programme, have invested money and that money is matched by the city council. In addition to that money, the city council has devoted a great deal of officer time and resources to ensure that the programme runs smoothly and that tenants are assisted in carrying out their role. That partnership is not just one between the public agencies, but involves those who live in homes on the estate. That is important. Those people first put themselves up for election to an estate management board, prior to the introduction of the estate action programme. As a result of that programme, those people are actively representing their community. The ethos of the area has changed, because people are committed to working for their community.

The benefits of that successful three-way partnership have rubbed off not only in terms of the physical improvement of homes, but in terms of the establishment of other organisations. The same tenants who were involved in setting up the estate management board have also set up Belle Isle Winter Aid. That organisation provides a lot of community care for hundreds of elderly people not just in the estate management board area, but throughout Belle Isle.

The estate action programme has therefore led to a spillover of participation in wider community work. Much of the work of Belle Isle Winter Aid has been funded by the urban programme and the loss of that programme threatens

[Mr. John Gunnell]

to undermine some of the things that have developed through the estate action programme. That should be borne in mind.

The estate action programme has downsides as well as upsides. It is important to consider the programme in a balanced manner. It is not sufficient for people to offer either a blanket acceptance or a blanket rejection of programmes, as they so often do in the House. People must consider the effects of those programmes.

One of the downsides of the estate action programme is that the allocation of city council moneys is skewed. Because the estate action money is matched by the city council, it takes up a considerable amount of city council resources. Of the 38 housing management offices in Leeds, only four are involved in the estate action programme. Those four have received considerable capital resources at the expense of the other offices. I represent not only Hunslet and Belle Isle but Middleton and Morley. Considerable resentment is felt there about the fact that people in Belle Isle North can have their walls built for them.

A lady from Middleton came to see me. She still lives in a home where the lavatory is downstairs next door to the kitchen. She has no bathroom upstairs. When she told the housing management office that it was impossible for her in her physical condition to get downstairs at night to go to the toilet, she was told to take a bucket upstairs. In this day and age that is simply unacceptable.

When I spoke to the city council about that matter I was told that it would need about £500 million to put everything right. Its representatives told me that the least they needed was £120 million, which they bid for the last time they were able to make a full bid for the capital programme. Although I applaud some of the work being done in Belle Isle North, I recognise that my constituent in Middleton has less chance of getting basic amenities because of the way in which the allocation of money is skewed. An enormous amount of work needs to be done to the Sissons estate, where that woman lives. I recognise that it will be extremely difficult for that work to be undertaken. Similar problems are experienced on a number of estates in Morley and throughout the city. People resent the fact, quite understandably, that other people get their garden walls built when others are unable to get proper bathrooms and toilets installed.

The estate action programme has extremely good features. The way in which it gets people involved in working for their community is satisfactory, but that should not be achieved at the expense of everyone else. The Government must address that problem.

The housing investment programme allocation to Leeds for 1994-95 was £25.2 million. Given that £120 million is needed by the city to do essential work, that allocation is not satisfactory. When I wrote to the acting chief housing officer to ask why certain improvements had not been undertaken and new homes built, he replied:

"In 1994/5, for example, we were asked to submit a HIP bid based on 15 per cent. above, equal to, and 15 per cent. below our 1993/4 HIP allocation. We did this; we were informed that as a department we were either 'average' or 'well above average' in the areas of housing management, enabling and tenant involvement; we were cut by 20 per cent.!"

Had they been below average, by how much would their HIP have gone down? The money simply is not sufficient to do the job.

We should not denigrate the programmes that have been set up, but should be prepared to use them to the benefit of our constituents. One-off programmes, however, and programmes that reach only a small proportion of the city's population are no substitute for on-going maintenance programmes that are necessary in any city and every housing management office. To fund one programme but short-change others is not the consistent relationship that is necessary between partners. Partnership is working in Belle Isle North, but partnership between the Department of the Environment and Leeds city council and other city councils needs to be more broadly based to ensure that problems as significant as those of my constituent in Middleton are dealt with in the near future.

8.40 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words in this important debate.

I shall begin by commenting on some remarks made by the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston). Part of the mythology of how inner cities decline is the belief that commercial firms move out when they see more profitable opportunities on the rim of cities. She probably does not realise that I was associated with John Lewis when it moved into Bristol. I well remember that time because we made considerable efforts to persuade people to shop in the city centre. We were not helped by the then Bristol council, which did not provide opportunities for people to drive into the city centre, thereby making that shopping centre and other shops viable. It is sad that, despite what the hon. Lady said, the city council clearly contributed towards that development being on the edge of the city.

Ms Corston: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the enormous, new multi-storey car park right next door to the Gallery shopping centre, which has recently been completed with the full co-operation of the city council? It provides more car parking facilities than we have ever had.

Mr. Mans: I am well aware of that. I am also aware of the Bristol city council's incredible pricing policy for car parking during the 1980s, which discouraged people from using the spaces that were available.

Even at the late stage to which the hon. Lady referred, John Lewis pointed out at the inquiry into the development outside Bristol that if the development went ahead, there were not sufficient shopping opportunities to have stores of that size in the centre and outside. Clearly, if that development went ahead, it was bound to take priority. So the fact remains that Bristol city council was involved in what happened. The hon. Lady should therefore not blame commercial companies for the decline of Bristol city centre when the local council was clearly very much involved.

Ms Corston *rose—*

Mr. Mans: I do not wish to dwell on that point now.

Ms Corston: I made no complaint about commercial companies. They take their own commercial decisions and if they decide to relocate to other areas, we must ask what sort of Government are responsible for encouraging such irresponsible development, which destroys our inner cities. That is the question.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Lady has clearly not even bothered to read the latest guidance which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has published on that subject. It is false for the hon. Lady to suggest that the Government have promoted out-of-city developments while the previous Labour Government did nothing, because in the 1960s and 1970s they promoted more out-of-city developments of the sort the hon. Lady was complaining about than have been promoted since.

I shall make a few other remarks and dwell no further on Bristol. It is interesting to draw a distinction with present policies and some of the past policies on improving housing stock and the environment in which people live. During the early 1980s, I was a candidate for Stoke-on-Trent and saw the policies that had been adopted for many years, if not decades, by successive Labour-controlled local administrations. There were huge council housing estates where individuals were not part of what was going on. The estates were inhuman and rundown, and rents were not properly collected. One can see why those policies resulted in many of the problems that exist today.

Let us contrast the position in the early 1980s in Stoke with what is happening in north-west England today, particularly in my part of Lancashire on the Fylde coast. The solutions that are being adopted are not all-embracing but multi-faceted. They are small solutions that take individuals into account. My borough council of Wyre has introduced a number of initiatives that have resulted in a transformation in Fylde in the past few years. Of a population of just over 100,000, well under 100 people are technically homeless and, of those, very few are ever in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Indeed, those people can be counted on the fingers of one hand. That is largely as a result of the local council's policy of trying to find smaller solutions to meet individuals' needs.

For instance, temporary self-contained flat accommodation is provided for people who have, for some reason, become homeless, so that they are not put in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That approach is a partnership between the local council, the private rented sector and housing associations in the area. Moreover, local people appreciate the fact that they must take part in that process. They cannot simply rely on the local council to provide their housing needs when things go wrong. They are part of the process and are encouraged to find ways of solving their own problems, and assistance is given in that.

The fact that we do not have much council housing stock has, in a sense, helped in finding those solutions. As a result of involving the private sector, private tenants and housing associations, we have few homeless people. Many people from Scotland come to the area during the summer and, at the end of the holiday season, in September and October, they prefer staying in the Fylde area to returning to Glasgow. So the problem is not as small as it might appear at first. None the less, sensible policies rather than universal solutions have made a huge difference to homelessness and housing in my part of Lancashire.

In that respect, I commend the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Minister responsible for housing in the various initiatives that have been put forward over a number of years. My local council has taken advantage of those initiatives, to the great benefit of local people. I wish that more councils, particularly those controlled by the Labour party, would look more carefully at a multi-faceted approach that involves tenants in their own solutions. In Wyre, for instance, most housing stock is run by tenants' associations. The effect on those estates is stunning. As a result of the tenants being involved in managing, the estates are more easily cleaned up and people do not wait for the council to provide the maintenance required. They go out and do things themselves with the initiatives available. Alongside that, we have a strict rent collection policy. I am convinced that that has meant that there has been money in the kitty to spend on the maintenance of those houses, which has meant not only that people want to live in them, but that they feel proud of the houses in which they live.

I have to compare the policies in boroughs such as mine, where rent collection is considered important, with those of other boroughs, especially others in the north-west, such as Liverpool, where there seems to be an equivocal approach to whether people should pay rent at all. As a result, debts arise at borough level, maintenance of council estates does not take place and the whole city gives the impression of being run down. I am pleased to say that in Liverpool there are signs of an improvement. There are signs that even that council is considering several small solutions, rather than one universal solution driven by the ideology of the past, quite often supported by the Labour party.

I should add a few other points about the environment in our housing estates, around where people live. A couple of years ago, I was fortunate enough to promote a private Member's Bill, which is now the Traffic Calming Act 1992. Although that was designed to slow down traffic, it was also designed to improve the environment around people's homes. Often the streets in our urban areas have become race tracks and people have been pushed away from the common areas of many of our suburbs. That is a silly way to use those common spaces.

As a result of the 1992 Act and of the Government's policy—specifically, those of the Department of the Environment—we are reclaiming those areas, so that the motor-car is no longer dominant and people can live outside their houses, in the streets, without being at risk from motor-cars racing along at huge speeds. In many cities, we have introduced enlightened schemes as regards street furniture, plantings, the use of different road surfaces, more colour, fewer screens to prevent people getting on to the road and, most important of all, slowing down the traffic.

Although my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction has just left the Chamber, I should say that it is noticeable that, in his home constituency of Ealing, enlightened schemes are constantly being introduced, which have had quite an effect on the environment in which people live. That is what it is all about. We are trying to encourage people, with help from central and local government and the voluntary and private sectors, to improve their living environment, both in their houses, by improving the quality and maintenance of the housing and introducing self-help schemes, and around their houses, by ensuring that the car does not dominate the streets.

We are all aware of the mistakes that have been made by many Governments in the past. Policies such as proposing one monolithic solution to a specific problem, bulldozing through communities and building high-rise flats and accommodation that has not been properly thought out have not worked. That is what confronts us, and what has confronted us in the past few years.

[Mr. Mans]

I believe that the way forward is through the very different approach that we have now adopted, whereby we understand that there is no one specific solution to the housing problems in this country and that we must involve the tenants and the people themselves and provide initiatives, both at central and local government level, involving the public and the private sector. I commend the Government for following that policy.

8.53 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I was especially interested by the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Anyone who represents an inner-city constituency would recognise the problems that he described. Like those of my right hon. Friend and, I suspect, of many other Members with such constituencies, my advice surgeries are filled, week after week, with people asking for help with housing problems, to the point where I almost despair when someone walks in and sits down and it turns out, when he starts talking, that it is a housing problem.

In 20 years of dealing with housing problems in my area, I cannot remember a time when it was so difficult to offer positive help to people—people who are threatened with homelessness, seeking a transfer, or trying to find a private letting when all that is on offer is a six-month shorthold lease that requires the payment of a huge deposit. In that context, the speech of the Secretary of State at the beginning of the debate would not only have filled my constituents with despair, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton suggested, but made them extremely angry about the arrogant and contemptuous way in which the problems that they have to face was being treated.

We are all familiar with the policies that the Government have been following: encourage home ownership at all costs and the right to buy for council tenants, force up rents to encourage people to buy and push council tenants out of the public sector. The reaction of council tenants to the voluntary transfer of their estates has not been very positive. The vast majority of them used to live with private landlords, and the last thing that they want to do is to go back to being the tenant of a private landlord.

Many tenants have moved into owner-occupation. It is often the best property that has been sold—very good for the person who has bought it, but not very much good for anyone else whose name is on the waiting list or who is trying to obtain a transfer. In my local authority area, it is possible to count on the fingers of one hand the number of four-bedroomed properties that become available for letting in a year. That is one of the consequences of the right to buy.

The other thing that happened is that tenants were persuaded into quite unsuitable purchases. Earlier, the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said that people who bought flats and became council leaseholders had done so with their eyes open. Of course, that was not really quite the truth. What happened is that people were persuaded by the Government that they were getting a bargain if they bought a flat, and local authorities that tried to point out the pitfalls were threatened that, if they did so, their sales would be taken over by the Department of the Environment and they would no longer be able to handle their own properties.

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction is well aware of the problems that now confront those tenants, or ex-tenants, after they have bought their council flats. A month or two ago, I went to meet him with a delegation of council leaseholders. They are unable to meet rehabilitation costs that are legitimately required by the local authority. They are unable to sell because building societies red-line the areas that they live in. They are completely trapped.

I am aware of the answer that the Minister gave my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) this afternoon. He said that he hopes to lay an order introducing a scheme to help council leaseholders who need to move and that, where leaseholders can buy more suitable homes from their local authority, that scheme will allow the council to take their present flat back in exchange and offset the price paid against the sale price of the exchanged property.

Unfortunately, that solution raises more questions than it answers. Who will decide what is a more suitable home? Will it be another flat? Very few of the people who have bought flats will want to move to another flat and be stuck with exactly the same problem of not being able to move again. Is the council supposed to keep houses available? If so, what consequences will that have for the rest of the programme? What happens to leaseholders who do not want to stay in that region and want to move out? What happens to leaseholders who do not want to move but cannot afford the rehabilitation costs? The Department of the Environment says that only about 2 per cent. of leaseholders face such a problem. That may be the number of people who are trying to sell and cannot, but it is by no means the sum total of people who will be affected.

The Government initiatives on inner-urban areas have been mentioned a number of times in the debate. They include city challenge, housing action trusts, estate action and the single regeneration budget. Clearly, some good schemes have developed through those initiatives, such as partnerships between local authorities and the private sector. I have nothing against partnership schemes with the private sector, and I can think of very few Labour-controlled local authorities that have. Those authorities are at the forefront of setting up economic development units to promote such initiatives.

I am pleased that Priory Court estate, a major estate in my constituency, is to receive estate action money. I cannot think of a single example in my area of a local authority deciding that it could not or would not do the work where estate action money was available. As my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) said, that is not extra money; it is available at the expense of cuts in the mainstream programme, and must be seen in the context of an overall cut.

The Government will no doubt hold up the Waltham Forest housing action trust as a success. It is redeveloping four ex-council estates—the first building work has just begun. The housing action trust is not just about housing. It sets up construction training courses for tenants and employs part-time tenant information workers who must come from the estates. It appoints its own staff to manage estates—there is no question of compulsory competitive tendering. It requires contractors who undertake the building work to use local labour. It offers a scheme whereby tenants with skills are given work as labour-only sub-contractors on their estates.

The housing action trust offers tenants a range of choices in their new homes on door fittings, different styles of doors and windows, kitchen units and wardrobes. It even offers tenants the choice of a cat flap in the back door. I can imagine what the Minister would say if a Labour-controlled local authority built new houses and told prospective tenants that it would meet the costs of installing cat flaps in back doors.

I do not mind tenants being offered such a choice and money being spent to develop decent housing. I hope that the housing action trust carries out the work and the estates are rebuilt. However, I am angry at the way that the work is being done at the expense of everyone else. In any case, the tenants on the estates have waited since 1988 for work to start. In 1988, the local council developed plans to rebuild the estate. Six years later, those plans are being used by the housing action trust. The Government refused to give the local council the money for the project. Eventually, because the Government were embarrassed when Prince Charles gave the council an award for design, they offered the housing action trust. Six years later, the work has started, but it is at the expense of mainstream programmes everywhere else.

Next year, another special programme, the single regeneration budget, will swallow up, among other things, section 11 grants, which have been part of urban policy for many years. The importance of the work that is carried out through section 11 grants has been mentioned already. Will the Minister explain what will happen to existing projects? There will be no ring fencing of the money when we receive the new single regeneration budget. The guidelines that have been issued make no specific reference to educational needs. One of the 10 draft objectives refers to ethnic minority communities. There are signs that the money will simply be pump-priming money. Using the single regeneration budget for pump priming may be sensible and legitimate in an economic development project. However, when there is a continuing need for section 11 grants, it is wrong. It is likely to mean that successful schemes will disappear altogether.

We need a Government who are prepared to take off their blinkers. They must cease their dogmatic housing policies and recognise that investment is needed. Investment in building and construction will not just improve the quantity and quality of supply but create jobs and save revenue. Therefore, it makes good housing and economic sense.

9.4 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): I listened to the Secretary of State replying to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and repeating the old allegation, often thrown at my party, that ours is the party of the provider, not the receiver, of services—in this case, housing. One of the main thrusts of Government policy has been to encourage private sector housing and to move subsidies away from bricks and mortar and towards the individual, as well as running down the public sector's involvement. Another—not deliberate this time—consequence of Government policies on home ownership has been the active discouragement of people from becoming home owners, owing to the problems in the housing market of the past few years.

Whether deliberate or accidental, the effects of Government policy are clear. We know that, as a result of Government policies, £3.8 billion is paid out to landlords through the housing benefit scheme. In Coventry, £24 million is paid out in this way to provide housing that is, by and large, substandard compared with that provided by local authorities and housing associations. We can therefore hardly say that Government policy is aimed at the users. The users do not choose to live in substandard housing that costs £80 a week, when local authority housing costs less than £40 a week. People will only live in such housing when the Exchequer is picking up the revenue tab for it. The benefit is not, in effect, a well-targeted subsidy for the people living in private sector housing but a massive, grotesque and unjustified subsidy to landlords. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State had the cheek to try to suggest that my party was the party of the providers, not the party of the receivers, of services. That is certainly not true in respect of housing.

Another main plank of policy in respect of which the Government seek to misrepresent our views is the right to buy. Their policy was sold to people in terms of giving them choice, opportunity and freedom. It was also said that it would be good for social cohesion—home owners would gain a stake in the poorer estates and would then provide some sort of leadership in those communities, thereby enhancing social cohesion.

In Coventry, which is not unlike the rest of the nation in this regard, one third of the houses in the city have been sold, almost without exception on the better estates and in the better areas. Within a generation those estates will effectively be privately owned. No one who can help it will stay in the rented system that the Government have imposed, paying the subsidy, if he lives in a decent house and has the right to buy. So as the old tenants move out and the new tenants move in—particularly those not subsidised by the housing benefit scheme—they will exercise the right to buy, and the better housing estates will become wholly private. And the few people who have exercised the right to buy in the problem estates—the ones who are supposed to provide social cohesion there—will find themselves still living with the worst of the problems of those estates. There are examples of people who are trapped in houses bought under the right-to-buy policy which they cannot sell or release, from which the most appalling consequences flow. Far from providing social cohesion, the right-to-buy policy has divided communities by splitting off the rented sector as completely welfare oriented and all the best housing has been sold off on estates that have effectively become private.

There are many examples of people being ripped off by spiv behaviour which runs from children buying on behalf of their parents in order to become the next generation of private landlords through to companies setting themselves up to target people on problem estates and buy their houses below the price paid under the right-to-buy policy, then profiteer off the back of such purchases by renting them out. Such behaviour is utterly disgraceful and should be investigated. Examples can be found on estates in Coventry which point to that.

In two areas, the Government's stated aims and policies have been completely reversed, and they have achieved the opposite of what they set out to do. People from within the Government have recognised the failures of their own policies. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn referred to the report released last week after an 18-month

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

delay—during which the Government attempted to sit on it—which pointed out that those policies had failed, with the consequences that I have described.

What we need in terms of Government policy is not what is being delivered. The Government's response to the report has effectively been that they are addressing the issues through the setting up of the single regeneration budget into which has gone the housing action fund, section 11 grant and many other funds.

One thing which has not been made clear but which needs to be made clear—and which I hope the Minister will make clear when he replies—is whether estate action will continue within the SRB. The Government have not yet made clear the size of the cut that has been imposed through the SRB.

In evidence to the Select Committee on the Environment, officials from the Department of the Environment admitted that there was a 10 per cent. to 12 per cent. cut in funds as a result of the SRB. But that is on top of cuts that had already been announced but which the Government are now trying to disguise by putting the various budgets together into the SRB. The comparative cuts—had the programmes continued with their original level of funding—are well in excess of 20 per cent. I hope that the Government will at least show some transparency in putting forward figures that show exactly what has happened to all the different programmes that have been put together in the SRB. They are deliberately trying to hide those in answer to parliamentary questions and they have been doing so for some time.

Will housing issues continue to be dealt with once the SRB is introduced? In the west midlands, which is putting bids together now, we have been told that strategic issues that will be considered within the SRB include an automotive component park, science parks, employment land provision, the Birmingham northern relief road, the greening of urban areas, rural regeneration, coal closure issues, regional public transport priorities, higher education institutions and national education and training targets.

All those issues are laudable in themselves, but there is not a single mention of housing among those priorities. As estate action has disappeared completely within the SRB, will it continue in any form and at any level? As has been said, it was top sliced from local authority spending in the first place. My fear is that it will disappear altogether and that estate action funding will be discontinued.

If we want to solve some of the problems created within our cities, power must be returned to local authorities. They should be made accountable to the people who elect them and be given the powers and tax base to get on with the job. For too long, we have gone down the road of deliberate on-going centralisation. No matter which party is in control—and there are people in the Tory party who believe this—and no matter what decision is taken at whichever level, a decision taken in Whitehall and applied 94 miles away in Coventry or 150 miles away in Manchester will not be a good decision.

Let us return to properly financed local government, return the business rate to local authorities, get rid of capping, and have good, strong and accountable local government rebuilding communities in cities, so that they will again be places in which people want to live.

9.15 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): In 1941, McInnes wrote in "Above Suspicion" that it was God who made the country and man who made the town. It is a pity that man did not learn better. After listening to today's debate, I can only add that it may have been God who made the country, but it is a pity that the men and women who run our towns and cities have not had their commitment to urban communities supported by the Government.

Urban policy debates are always tales of two cities—the cities that Conservative Members believe exist and the towns and cities of Britain as experienced by Opposition Members, who know what urban Britain is really like. I am not surprised that the Government ran out of Back-Bench speakers. We have continually made the point that only Opposition Members care for urban Britain—Conservative Members just make noises and pretend to be interested.

We heard excellent contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and my hon. Friends the Members for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington), for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth). I particularly congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Barking (Ms Hodge), for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on their maiden speeches. All three follow much-respected and much-admired former Members of Parliament. As the former leaders of Islington, Newham and Bradford councils respectively, they spoke with enormous authority and considerable knowledge of local government. They set out passionately the case against the Government. I am sure that they will each make a distinguished contribution to the business of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barking is renewing old acquaintances. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) served as her vice-chair of housing in Islington, and when I worked at Islington 15 years ago she was my first boss.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn eloquently explained how the Government have failed to deliver housing policy that meets the needs of the people. In the time available, I will concentrate on urban issues. My task is much easier than that of my hon. Friend. Whereas the Government pretend to have a housing policy of sorts, they have never pretended to have a coherent urban policy.

Coherence was lacking in abundance in the Secretary of State's speech. It is no surprise that he has not bothered to show his face for the conclusion of this debate. We witnessed something historic, because it was the last speech that the right hon. Gentleman will make as Secretary of State—and, judging by his performance, he realises that he is for the chop in the reshuffle.

One of my hon. Friends said that the Secretary of State's extraordinary speech reminded him of the worst of the Cambridge university debating society. I felt a bit cross because I was also a member of that society. I can tell the House that, although I heard some pretty dreadful speeches there, the speech today from the Secretary of State was 1,000 times worse than the worst speech that I ever heard at the union.

As the Government's own evaluation has shown, urban Britain is in a state of crisis. We face increased drug abuse, truancy from schools, fear of crime and rates of family

breakdown and communities are being set against communities. That is the legacy of 15 years of Conservative mismanagement of urban policy. It is no wonder that 4 million people leave our cities every five years.

In the summer edition of the magazine *BURA* published yesterday, the Secretary of State said:

"Our urban centres matter too much to follow America's horrifying lead into despair and decay. We in Europe can recapture the spirit of the city. We must build for the future."

By his own words, the Government can be judged to have failed.

It is not that the Government have been short of schemes; there have been plenty of schemes. The problem is that they have lacked direction, cohesion, consistency and purpose. New schemes have been devised and dropped at a great rate in every year since 1979, the difference between them being that they deliver fewer and fewer funds. In fact, the Secretary of State and inner-city policy very much resemble "Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat"—a splattering of a TEC here, a dash of a CAT there, a bit of a UDC somewhere else, mixed with a brightly coloured city challenge scheme embroidered with the jewels of inner-city policy. There was a boxful of those, all of them now faded, from Compacts to enterprise zones and now down to the single regeneration budget. In the words of Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, for the Secretary of State, a latter-day Joseph, "Any dream will do", provided that it can be launched in a blaze of glory.

Let us consider city pride, just 240 days old today. That scheme called on Manchester, Birmingham and London to invest tremendous time, effort and resources in producing a plan and a brochure for their cities' future. The winner of that bizarre game show then receives absolutely nothing —not a single, additional penny of resources. Perhaps it is not quite nothing; it could be a visit from the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction wearing a hard hat —an excellent photo-opportunity for the Minister or the Secretary of State.

The Government cannot urge us to embrace city pride while robbing our towns and cities of civic pride. If our cities are to flourish and develop, they need support and funding, allowing them to create communities of opportunity and hope. Our civic leaders need to be allowed the freedom to provide for the people who directly gave them a mandate.

In the debate on inner cities on 25 March, the Under-Secretary dwelt on the importance of the derelict land grant and the need to bring contaminated land back into active use. On Monday, just two days ago, the Government announced that the standards required to be met for reclaimed land were to be dropped. No doubt the grant goes next. That means that the health of the people returning to those areas to work will be seriously compromised. The perennial trick of giving on paper but taking in reality is causing our once great towns and cities to slip into a mass of decay. Unless there is a return to proper strategic and targeted funding for our cities, the social and environmental consequences will be irreparable.

If the total regeneration budget of £1.4 billion were used so that every pound provided at least a full pounds' worth of regeneration, our towns and cities would have no cause for concern. As it is, funds are squandered on consultants and quangos, not on homes, education and crime prevention.

The urban development corporation was quoted at length by the Secretary of State. Bristol UDC spent £6.4 million on consultants. Merseyside UDC spent £24.4 million. The list goes on, a ledger of waste and squandered resources. We need look no further than the Minister's own constituency in Ealing, where the incoming Labour leadership has been left a crippling budget deficit of £15 million by the defeated Conservative leadership. *[Laughter.]* The Secretary of State may laugh, but it is not a laughing matter for the people of Ealing. It is an example of why more and more people are waking up to the fact that Labour is better.

The single regeneration budget is yet another scheme that has been trumpeted as the saviour of urban Britain. The bidding guidance is as clear as mud; local authorities and others have inundated the integrated regional offices with requests for information and guidance, taking up valuable resources in the process. The Government remain unable to reassure community and voluntary groups that they will be supported in their bids: bids for housing action and section 11 grant are being positively discouraged. Not only must those groups now compete with training and enterprise councils and other large consortia; they are being forced into a dialogue with a level of government with which they have no experience of dealing.

The single regeneration budget provides a total budget of just £100 million of unallocated funds for the whole of Britain, compared with the annual grant of £261 million that was available to 57 urban programme authorities this year. As the House knows, the urban programme was abolished by ministerial letter after being in existence for 20 years. Just £100 million of unallocated funds will be available to the whole country next year! The SRB should be renamed the SNB—simply no budget.

The role of local authorities in putting together bids and co-ordinating the approach has been completely down-played, and the bidding left open to groups that act without a mandate from local people. At the start, we were promised that each integrated regional office would produce a regeneration statement; a few months on, those statements have been forgotten. I hope that the Minister will tell us when they are due to be published.

In short, the SRB does not provide any guaranteed funds for inner-city areas. This is a purely political omission, condemning the most needy to continued hardship. The Government cannot encourage city pride—as the Secretary of State has done—and then rob the town halls and city centres of their pride. We need to return to a time when trust, confidence and integrity were an essential part of the relationship between local authorities and central Government.

The attitude of the Department of the Environment to our civic leaders is made explicit by the treatment by the Government—and this Minister in particular—of Greenwich council. Greenwich submitted plans to hold centenary celebrations in the borough: what better place could be found in Britain than the place where time itself is measured? The proposals have been on the Minister's desk for more than a year, but there has been no reply. No doubt the council will receive one on 31 December 1999.

We need only look at the recent election results to see that the Conservative party does not understand urban life and—more important—does not represent our urban areas. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn observed, just one major urban area outside London is now controlled by the Conservative party—Trafford.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

The House will recall the disgraceful attack on Birmingham city council during the local government elections. This tactic of trying to undermine the effectiveness of one of our nation's greatest cities failed; indeed, the Labour leadership—no doubt because of the attack—was returned with an increased majority. That is further proof, if we needed it, that Labour local government provides the services that people want and need at prices that they can afford.

In October last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn set up an urban policy inquiry, City 2020. The committee—composed of experts, academics and people who live in our towns and cities—has visited more than 33 urban areas in six months to take evidence from councillors, chief executives, community workers, business people and city challenge board members. We have listened to and studied more than 1,000 separate pieces of oral and written evidence. We have been from Greenwich to Glasgow, from Southampton to Sheffield and from Brighton to Burnley. On Saturday, we held our national conference in Reading: it was attended by more than 250 representatives from all walks of urban life.

The feedback from the conference has been overwhelming. There are two overriding themes with which all are concerned—the need for proper funds to be released and the need for local authorities to take the lead, free from central Government interference. We found that, the Government evaluator found that, and the people of our towns and cities know it. When will the Government act? As part of the inquiry, we have seen some excellent examples of co-operation between local authorities, central Government, the private sector and community groups.

Our cities handle budgets bigger than those of some countries. In 1990, inner-city London employed 1 million people and added £4.2 billion in manufacturing; Sheffield employed 204,000 people and added £1 billion; Birmingham employed 366,000 people and added £2.7 billion. For economic reasons alone, we cannot afford to neglect our cities.

Dr. Hampson: We can all find examples of anything that we want to prove, but every urban development corporation initiative has worked by drawing in money undreamt of under the Labour Government; it simply did not happen in those days. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and I had an exchange on that subject earlier, I offer the following example. Without the urban development corporation, and its Government backing and Government money, a concert hall would not now be being built—indeed, it is about to open—in Manchester.

Mr. Vaz: There are many examples of urban initiatives led by local authorities, and if the hon. Gentleman will wait, I shall tell him precisely what the private sector thinks of Government regeneration schemes.

In March, City 2020 went to the United States to meet some of President Clinton's closest policy advisers. American cities have suffered a tremendous onslaught for the past 12 years of Republican rule, but now inner-city communities finally believe that they can make a difference, and that their cities need not be ghettoised and ruled by guns and mobs. The Clinton Administration, unlike the British Government, have, through their empowerment zones, earmarked real and substantial new funds for urban regeneration. Our main conclusion was that instituting a climate for change and improvement, with long-term support for regeneration schemes, is simple given the political will.

We have heard a lot from the Secretary of State—and he may well look at me with that boyish grin.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the Clinton Administration and people throughout the United States are coming to this country to learn how we do things in our cities? The United States is learning from us. Those people do not come to learn from the Labour party, because they know that the Labour party has nothing to teach them.

Mr. Vaz: I am glad that the Secretary of State has rejoined us. He will know that the Clinton advisers were full of praise for the work done in Labour cities, under Labour control.

We have heard a lot from the Secretary of State about the Robson report. If it supports Government policy, why did the Secretary of State suppress it for 18 months? We welcome that excellent report. It is interesting that the publication title was changed from "Evaluating Government Urban Policy" to "Assessing the Impact of Urban Policy"—a handy change of title at the last moment.

The results of the evaluation support what we have been saying for years. The first conclusion is that money, when it is spent, has an effect, and that it is impossible to bring about regeneration without proper and sufficient funding. The second finding is the need for a coherent strategy across Departments. Thirdly, structures and mechanisms that encourage long-term partnership should be instituted, and local authorities should be allowed to play a significant part in such partnerships, along with local communities.

The evaluation flags up two crucial points—the need to create employment opportunities and the need to make cities more attractive places to live in. We urge the Government to heed the report and its recommendations.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) talked about private finance, so let me tell him about the private sector. The Government, and the Secretary of State in particular, do not seem to understand that the private sector is not a regenerative agency per se. It is not fair to people in our urban areas or to the private sector to insist that social schemes be undertaken without support from the public sector. We cannot expect long-term solutions to be implemented when the furthest ahead that cities and businesses can plan with committed funds is five years.

If the private sector has been ignored, the voluntary sector has been treated with contempt. Voluntary organisations, through meagre resources, have been able to provide a massive pool of people and expertise.

We need to define a new vision of urban life. We must then develop cities in a sustainable way instead of making them enter absurd competitions for funds against each other. Labour will abolish that competitive process. Our urban areas need help as a right. What we need is a new Magna Carta for our towns and cities and a new constitutional settlement between cities and central Government. There is hope out there. People out there in the voluntary sector—community workers, council leaders

and business people—are undertaking innovative schemes to regenerate their cities and they must be supported. This Government ignore their pleas at their great risk.

As long ago as 8 March 1988, the *Financial Times* warned:

"The British Government's announcement of a new programme for the inner cities is strong on presentation, but weak on new ideas or money".

The dilemma facing our cities is that since then more schemes have been launched, with thicker and thicker prospectuses.

In his speech today, the Secretary of State spoke about the true successes of our inner cities and he said that the Government saluted their achievements. He said that he wanted to continue with the revolution. He could not find a single local authority, one private company, any community group or any urban policy expert to agree with his extraordinary euphoria. Urban life has become intolerable, with a lack of resources, enterprise and cohesion, and now there is the misery of deregulated transport. Our Government should give massive support to our towns and cities to equip them to compete against the best in Europe and the best in the world. Our cities have great and proud histories, but they need the capacity to develop and grow, to attract worldwide investment and to generate international acclaim.

This debate has not been one about a Government searching for or defining an urban policy, but one about urban Britain searching for a Government. The real tragedy of tonight is that urban Britain has searched in vain.

9.36 pm

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction (Sir George Young): We have had a good and wide-ranging debate, highlighted by three first-class maiden speeches, to which I shall come in a moment. I point out to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) that earlier this week a delegation from the United States came to my office. They had spent the week looking at city challenge, development corporations and housing action trusts. They were interested in the innovations that we had introduced. If one compares our cities with some of the cities of the United States, one sees that the Americans have every bit as much to learn from what we are doing as the hon. Gentleman has to learn from what is happening in America.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East also referred to Ealing. He has a nerve to mention inherited debt. When the previous Labour council lost Ealing, it left £100 million of rolled-up debt. It had borrowed the money, but it did not have the courage to make any provision for interest. The Conservative administration had to double rents to pay for the Labour party's mistakes.

I want to reply to the debate and to deal with the serious points made by hon. Members on both sides. I start with the speech by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who had a rather selective memory of what happened between 1974 and 1979. He totally forgot about the intervention by the International Monetary Fund which brought about one of the greatest cuts in capital programmes that the country has seen. He said that the urban programme was being wound down. He did not mention city challenge, which has taken its place. He talked about his city of Manchester, but he did not mention the Trafford Park development corporation or the Central Manchester development corporation. He mentioned the estates that were being demolished and the fact that the excrescences were coming down. A Conservative Government are working with the private sector, with a local authority and with housing associations to demolish some of the monuments to socialism built in the 1960s and 1970s and to provide decent homes for people to live in. We are putting right in Manchester many of the mistakes made in the past. The worrying thing about the right hon. Gentleman's speech, which, I fear, was repeated in other speeches, was that it betrayed a hostility to good quality rented accommodation in the private sector. On the same day as the Rowntree Foundation published its recommendations outlining the role that the private rented sector could play in tackling the country's housing problems, the right hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members betrayed an innate hostility to the role that the private rented sector could play.

Mr. Soley: Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No, I must try to make progress. Many hon. Members have made serious speeches, which deserve a reply.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the people who need good-quality accommodation. I am not sure whether he was present at Question Time. The key statistic for those on the waiting list is how many people are rehoused each year. That is the currency that matters. More people are now being rehoused in new lettings from local authorities and housing associations than when the Government took office. We are making faster progress in moving people off the waiting lists than was the case when we took office. The right hon. Gentleman said that Government grant to Manchester had been cut. It has not. Between 1982-83 and 1993-94, Government grant to Manchester has increased in real terms by 31.2 per cent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) put right the omission in the right hon. Gentleman's—

Mr. Kaufman: Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No, I must try to make progress. The right hon. Gentleman did not give way in his speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] The right hon. Gentleman —*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. It seems that the Minister is not giving way. Is he clear about that?

Sir George Young: Yes.

Mr. Kaufman: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Sir George Young: The right hon. Gentleman—

Madam Speaker: Order. I must take a point of order from the right hon. Member.

Mr. Kaufman: It is a convention of the House that, when one hon. Member refers to another, that hon. Member gives way for the other hon. Member to respond. If the Minister is not ready to do that, it shows how baseless his arguments are in relation to me.

Madam Speaker: It is up to the hon. Member who has the floor to determine whether he will give way and I understand that the Minister is not prepared to give way.

Dr. Hampson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I suspect that it is a point of frustration. We must proceed with the debate.

Sir George Young: Madam Speaker, I am trying to reply to the debate. The right hon. Gentleman made a speech, during which he gave way to no one. He made a number of points with which I am trying to deal. If I had to give way to every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate, I would not make much progress in giving answers to the many points that have been made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West put right the omission in the right hon. Gentleman's speech by paying tribute to the work of the Leeds development corporation, for it has done sensational work in regenerating the inner part of Leeds, especially the Armouries site, which I visited. He was right to point out that the development corporation has promoted a different culture. It is a business-oriented body which is turning round derelict sites in the middle of Leeds, promoting new partnerships, new coalitions, and, as he rightly said, producing the gearing that we need if we are to make faster progress in promoting jobs in our inner cities.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) mentioned the condition of the nation's housing stock. Of course, the English house conditions survey published last year showed that between 1986 and 1991 the condition of the stock in all tenures had improved. The hon. Gentleman went on to mention empty homes. Yes, I agree with him. That is why this year I have asked local authorities to produce a strategy for the empty homes in their area so that they can be brought into use.

The hon. Gentleman then tried to claim authorship of a scheme, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), of converting offices into flats. We recently gave consent in Hammersmith for a block that had been built as offices to be converted into flats by housing associations. I am interested in the proposals put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak and, of course, we shall do what we can to promote them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) outlined how socialism can destroy jobs—quite right. [*Laughter.*]. He also pointed out that the inner city is about better health, better education, and a safer environment. The introduction of the single regeneration budget and the promotion of city challenge enables one to take that integrated approach.

I pay tribute to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge). Her tribute to Jo Richardson struck a chord and she described how the right to buy had been a very successful policy in her constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, she did not."] She did. She said that one third of the council's housing stock is being sold under the right to buy. *[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Lady is after the job of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). I prefer the Government's approach to the rather Stalinist approach that we saw in Islington.

Several hon. Members raised the question of rate support grant to local authorities. Rate support grant is only part of the story; there are other Government grants as well. The total, including RSG, has gone up by 40 per cent. over the past 10 years; within that, the share of the urban authorities programme has gone up from 26 per cent. to 32 per cent., so it is not true to say that we have starved inner-city local authorities of resources.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak rightly made the point that we should do more to rehabilitate properties and make better use of empty properties. I was interested in his suggestion that we should extend housing association grant to private developers—a proposition supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford). We are interested in that proposition; of course, it would need primary legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak rightly made the point that we need a broader base for private funding for housing associations. He suggested that housing associations might do more to promote a voluntary right to buy. I agree entirely with what he said.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) seemed to be surprised that we took receipts into account when we allocated housing capital funds. If he reflects on that, he will see that that helps the inner cities because they tend to have less receipts than areas in the shire districts; by taking receipts into account, we are helping the inner cities, rather than hindering them.

The hon. Gentleman went on—this was disappointing—to criticise the tenants incentive scheme and the cash incentive scheme. He may not know this, but those schemes are implemented by Labour-controlled councils as well as Conservative-controlled councils. They are popular with tenants. For the price of one home built by a housing association, one can get three new lets for people on the waiting list by giving cash incentives to existing tenants who want to become home owners. I was disappointed to hear the hon. Gentleman's criticism of the scheme because it was pioneered by a number of Labour councils, as well as Conservative councils. It is popular with local authority tenants. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be disappointed to learn that this popular scheme does not have the support of their Member of Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) touched on leasehold reform. He reminded the House that the important reform that went through last year was popular, and has introduced a more stable system.

I want to say something about the question raised by my hon. Friend—it was also raised by the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth)—about leaseholders who bought flats from their local authority under the right-to-buy scheme. A recent survey of council leaseholders undertaken by Bristol university found that 86 per cent. of respondents considered their flats to be good value-for-money purchases, and less than 2 per cent. reported difficulty in selling because lenders would not accept their flats as security. There are real problems for that 2 per cent., especially if they want to move, say, to accommodate a growing family.

I intend to introduce a scheme which will make it easier for local authorities to help. Where they can sell the leaseholder another home more suited to his needs, our scheme will enable the authority to take back the unsuitable flat at the right-to-buy price paid for it. The scheme will be introduced by way of an amendment to the Local Authority (Capital Finance) Regulations 1990, and I hope to lay the order before the House in the next few days.

Naturally, most leaseholders would prefer to sell their flats on the open market. Once again, we plan to help. We have consulted the Council of Mortgage Lenders and local authorities about a review of the arrangements under which authorities can indemnify mortgages. That should create a better market by making it easier for banks and building societies to lend to prospective purchasers.

We are also addressing the question of service charges. Again, there is no need to be alarmist. The Bristol survey found that about 5 per cent. of leaseholders had serious difficulties paying their service charges. Measures to help them will be included in a good practice guide for public sector landlords which we plan to publish in the autumn.

We had an excellent maiden speech from the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), who spoke from the seat previously occupied by Bob Cryer, from which he used to torment Ministers at all hours of the day and night. As a former leader of Bradford city council, the hon. Gentleman is aware of the partnership work that is being done with the Government in his city. I had a meeting with the hon. Gentleman a few hours after he became a Member of Parliament on section 11, a subject raised by other Members. We do understand the issue and we will do what we can to find a way through.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) put the Robson report in perspective, and I was delighted to hear of the voluntary city challenge which she promoted in her constituency. I very much welcome that approach, and it shows that one need not always rely on public money.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) was worried that outer ring estates might be penalised by the Government's policies. That need not be the case, as the Castle Vale housing action trust in Birmingham is an outer city estate. There is no reason at all why out-of-city estates should miss out on the Government's initiatives. She referred to another theme which ran through many speeches in saying that she did not like the notion of competition. We make no apology at all for injecting a note of competition into the allocation of resources.

If there is one thing that has driven up the quality of local authority performance in the past three or four years, it has been the allocation of resources according to the quality of solutions as well as the intensity of problems. A number of Opposition Members wanted to go back to the old system, where the worse your problems, the more money you got. We say—the better the solutions, the more money you are likely to get, and that is the right way ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) made an enlightened speech outlining the case for Government intervention in cities, and gave advance warning of his single regeneration bid in Tolladine. It sounds exactly the sort of scheme which could qualify for help. My hon. Friend was interested in extending the rough sleepers initiative to his city, and I commend that.

My hon. Friend outlined the advantages of large-scale voluntary transfer, a policy which has not so far been implemented by any Labour-controlled council. A key point that my hon. Friend made was that, as a result of the transfer of stock, 1,000 new units of rented accommodation will be made available to people in the areas concerned. I urge Opposition Members to raise their sights and look at alternative forms of tenure and ownership if they are to make faster progress in tackling housing problems.

I turn to the last of the maiden speeches, a first-class speech by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms). I am only sorry that more Opposition Members were not here to hear what the hon. Gentleman said. I do not want to embarrass him, but the note of optimism which came through in his speech contrasted sharply with the rather defeatist and pessimistic notes that we heard from so many Opposition Members.

The hon. Gentleman said that there were "great grounds for optimism" in Newham. He went on to say that the Government have "invested heavily" in east London, and that "valuable foundations" have been laid. That is a recognition of the work that the Government have put into the inner cities. I do not want to embarrass the hon. Gentleman at the beginning of his political career, but I hope that that realism will stay with him during his stay in the House and that the Whips and the Opposition Front Bench do not get at him to tell him to tone down his remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central made the case—if ever one needed to hear it made—for compulsory competitive tendering for local government services. He explained the wide variety of costs for identical services provided in a number of London boroughs, and made the case for housing management CCT, which is opposed by Opposition Members, in a first-class speech.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) made a mistake which was also made by many other Opposition Members. He assumed that property in the private rented sector was by definition bad, while property in the public sector was by definition good. One simply has to walk around the inner cities to see that that is not the case. There are many examples of good quality private rented accommodation, and all too many examples of poor quality public sector accommodation. One simply should not assume that, because ownership is in one sector, the quality of the accommodation is bad.

Mr. Straw: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No, I must make progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs)—

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Mr. Straw: No, I am not giving way. I am trying to deal with points made by Opposition Members during their speeches.

The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) made a long speech about Bristol. One of the things that we are trying to do through our planning policy is to avoid the polarisation which she described, where local authority tenants are in one part of an area and owner-occupiers are in another. If she reads our planning guidance note, PPG 3, she will see that we are promoting mixed, more stable and better balanced communities through our planning policy.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) paid tribute to the Government's estate action programme and described its good features and the qualities that had been promoted on the estates that he represents. The key thing that he mentioned, on which we are keen, was tenant participation, which is one of the themes running through our housing policy.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) alleged that the single regeneration budget does not mention education. That is not true. It is specifically mentioned in the guidelines to the SRB.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) seemed to have some doubts about his party's commitment to the right to buy. As one listened to his speech one doubted whether the Labour party ever really believed in the right to buy. It is only the popularity of the policy outside that has caused it to change its views.

[Mr. Straw]

The existing commitments to estate action will be honoured. We have been entirely open and honest about the SRB baseline, which has been clearly stated. As the urban development corporations approach their wind-up, more money will be freed for new bids.

If one wants to see the impact of Government policy, one need do no more than go round Bonamy estate in Southwark or Holly Street estate in Hackney. Those large estates, which were built about 30 years ago, are now being demolished with help from the Government. That work, which is funded by money from the Housing Corporation and the private sector, will result in stable communities being built.

The reality is that we are winning the arguments about the way forward in housing and inner cities. We are now setting the agenda that other people are following. Out there, in the real world, the best local authorities are developing their enabling role. They are talking to the business community, enthusing local people and are coming up with practical, radical solutions. Out there, in the real world, private finance is increasingly being brought in to help tackle the needs of housing and our inner cities. Out there, in the real world, we have brought together the regeneration programmes under a single regeneration budget. We have brought together the regional offices of four Government Departments and we now have one single Government office to tackle all the problems in the round.

We are now devolving power to tenants to manage their own estates. We are driving up housing management standards by introducing CCT. We are promoting alternative forms of ownership of local authority estates. We are promoting new means of tackling the problems of the worst estates through housing action trusts.

The Opposition's solution to the issues with which we have grappled for the past six hours is set out in a letter to *The Independent* on 21 June from the hon. Member for Leicester, East. He made two assertions which were not true and then a proposition on which the House will have its own views. First, he asserted:

"City challenge, launched in a blaze of glory, has gone."

That would be alarming news to the 31 winners of the city challenge, who will be spending £850 million—

Mr. Vaz *rose—*

Sir George Young: —between now and—

Mr. Vaz *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Sir George Young: That news would be particularly alarming to his city of Leicester, where £180 million will be invested in his life time.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East then asserted that the capital receipts holiday failed to raise the amount expected. That is not true. The local authorities' own estimates currently stand at £1.8 billion, as opposed to the Government's estimate of £1.75 billion.

I want hon. Members to hear about the vision that the hon. Member for Leicester, East offered to *The Independent*. He said:

"The vision for our cities should be of the European style, similar to the cafe society promoted by The Independent."

As the hon. Member sits at his table on the pavement, a Campari and soda in one hand and *The Independent* crossword in the other, and as he listens to a street musician playing a Strauss waltz, while he prescribes his solution —cocktails in Coventry, cappuccino in Cardiff, Martini in Manchester, bucks fizz in Bradford, Dubonnet in Derby —the Conservatives will be working. They will be working hard in our inner cities to create jobs and wealth, turning around socialist housing estates and building a vibrant and prosperous society.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 217, Noes 298.

Division No.277] **[10.00**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken

Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Ian
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Oiner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*

Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House commends the Government's achievements in urban and housing policy over the last 15 years, and recognises that Britain now leads the world in imaginative and constructive policy development in these areas; notes with approval the development of the Single Regeneration Budget and the Government Offices for the Regions which build on the widely recognised success of City Challenge and other initiatives; welcomes the formation of English Partnerships to carry forward the drive to improve derelict land; commends the continuing success of Urban Development Corporations in transforming areas of dereliction and disuse; notes that statutory homelessness acceptances are continuing their welcome decline; notes that housing associations are now expected to provide some 179,000 homes with Government funding over the first three years of this Parliament, substantially in excess of the 153,000 promised in 1992; congratulates the Government on the success of the Right to Buy and its tenant management initiatives; notes that the English House Conditions Survey showed an improvement in the fitness of housing in all sectors between 1986 and 1991; applauds the Government's continued efforts to secure maximum value for money from public spending, and to target resources on the areas and individuals most in need; and calls on the Government to continue to place England's urban communities at the heart of its policy, and to draw on the commitment and energy of local people and local bodies in tackling the problems of cities, while maintaining the sound public finances necessary for the sustained economic growth which is an essential component of further improvement not only in urban centres but in the whole country.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Wills and Administration Proceedings (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 3rd May, be approved.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Teampace (Pension Scheme)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Last week, the Secretary of State for Social Security announced the Government's response to the Goode report. Their proposals fell a long way short of what many of us would have liked. Nevertheless, there were some useful points in them, and the Minister certainly seemed to attach some significance to them.

Introducing his statement, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"Pensions are one of the most important ways in which people and their families hold a stake in this country. They are part of the fabric of a property-owning democracy—a fabric which we extended in the 1980s to cover large numbers left out before." —[*Official Report*, 23 June 1994; Vol.245, c.359.]

Tonight's debate concerns a story that, for many of my constituents and for those of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), began in the 1980s, but the way they were treated does not leave them feeling that they have any great stake in this country—or that the Government consider their stake worth looking after.

These constituents worked for a firm called Burman's Ltd., in south Birmingham. It was taken over by a firm known as Teampace Holdings, run by two gentlemen, Michael Spiers and Kenneth Shaw. Under their management, Teampace acted as a parasite. They would acquire a subsidiary, Burman's being one; Spiers and Shaw would become directors of the subsidiary, and would then appoint themselves trustees of the subsidiary's pension scheme. As trustees, they would then merge the existing pension scheme with the Teampace pension scheme, of which they were also the trustees.

Teampace Holdings is now in receivership. When the books were examined, it was found that the Teampace pension fund had a shortfall of about £2 million. The effect of that for many of my constituents who worked for the erstwhile Burman's Ltd. is that they have lost about half their pension entitlements.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Although my hon. Friend and I are mainly concerned with the Burman's pensioners, he will be aware that we have been contacted by pensioners in the JLS scheme in Redditch and in the Charlesworth Developments scheme in Dudley. No doubt we will soon be contacted by pensioners from GMS in Sheffield, from Dando International in Brighton and from Wild Barfield in Watford. This problem is happening across the country, and it is not just our constituents who are affected by the scandal.

Mr. Burden: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The scandal is of national significance, and it makes the failures of Ministers all the more serious.

How did the scandal come about? It seems that thousands of pounds collected from employees in pension contributions were not paid over to the Teampace pension fund. Apparently they were lost elsewhere in the Teampace empire. Then, of course, there is Spiers's and Shaw's own pension position. Not only did they make themselves trustees of the Teampace pension scheme, but they also made themselves members of that scheme. They wrote to each other increasing their personal pension benefits right up to the maximum allowed under Inland Revenue rules. There does not seem to have been much of a link between the benefits they paid themselves and the level of contributions to the scheme made on their behalf.

Not content with increasing their benefits under the Teampace scheme, Spiers and Shaw apparently decided to set up a special executive pension scheme. They called it the K and M scheme. It seems that it was principally for the benefit of themselves and their wives. The decision to set up that scheme and to transfer moneys out of the Teampace scheme was, of course, made by the trustees of the scheme —in other words, Spiers and Shaw again.

Money was transferred out of the Teampace scheme in the form of property. The property concerned was situated in Redditch, in the west midlands. A 999-year lease on the property was bought by Teampace Holdings in September 1990 from a firm called Halfine Ltd., which—surprise, surprise—was a wholly owned subsidiary of Teampace Holdings. Halfine acquired property from JLS Engineering, which was a firm that had—hon. Members have guessed it—been taken over by Teampace.

A price of £775,000 was paid to purchase that lease by the Teampace pension fund. Six months later, the freehold interest on that property was transferred to Messrs Shaw and Spiers, as trustees of the new executive scheme. At that stage, they secured an independent valuation of the property, but for £485,000. Quite how that property lost some £300,000 in value in six months is not clear. But then again, shady property deals appear to have been a forte of Messrs Shaw and Spiers.

Another property in Watford owned by the scheme did not collect any rents from tenants for a long period. That may seem surprising, until one finds that the tenant of the property was a firm called Wild Barfield. The directors of Wild Barfield are, of course, Messrs Spiers and Shaw. They may have got away without paying rent, but the losers of that failure to collect rent were, once again, the Teampace pension fund and my constituents and those of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members.

The receivers of Teampace Holdings later appointed independent trustees to try to sort out the mess, and for the past two years they have been trying to recover as much money as possible. Recently, there has been an out-of-court settlement, but what has happened to Messrs Shaw and Spiers? It seems clear that they were involved in a breach of trust, perhaps even in fraud. But the matter was never referred to the police. A dossier on the case was submitted to the Department of Trade and Industry on 29 March 1993 by the receiver. The response from the Department was silence, until the early part of this year.

My hon. Friend and I wrote to the Minister asking what he was doing in response to the horrendous story that had been put before him. Would Shaw and Spiers be disqualified from being company directors in view of the Teampace affair? Not only did the reply that we received on 22 June 1994 deny us access to the facts that had been laid before the Minister for the best part of a year, but effectively it also said that we could not do anything about the Teampace saga, because the time limit for proceedings on that issue expired in January 1994.

The implication was that lack of resources had prevented the Department from taking action until now. That seems to betray a weird set of priorities. The Department of Trade and Industry is apparently prepared to spend thousands of pounds on glossy publications and to devote hundreds of hours of staff time to deregulation

[Mr. Burden]

gimmicks that very few people appear to want, but when it comes to bringing crooks or wrongdoers to justice, and standing by people who have lost their pension entitlement, their security in their old age, suddenly the Department cannot find the resources to do that.

Ministers have assured me that things will be better in future, but Shaw and Spiers are still company directors to this day of, among others, a firm called Dando Drilling International. Still no criminal proceedings have been brought, and my constituents and those of other hon. Members still stand to lose many thousands of pounds in pension entitlements.

That story is a disgrace, and the Minister has some serious explaining to do.

10.23 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) for granting me time to make a contribution to the debate on a matter which affects our constituents and others too.

It is clear that Messrs Shaw and Spiers used the same technique against different victims from different pension funds. Their modus operandi was that company X was taken over by Teampace, and Shaw and Spiers appointed themselves directors and sole trustees of the pension scheme and transferred the assets from the old pension scheme to the Teampace pension scheme. Shaw and Spiers subsequently joined the pension scheme, but did not transfer in any payments for themselves. Then Mr. Shaw wrote Mr. Spiers a little note, and vice versa, to award themselves augmented benefits, to the maximum Revenue limits.

Later, Shaw and Spiers transferred the benefits that they awarded themselves to their own pension scheme set up for that purpose—the K and M executive pension fund. Presumably it was named after Ken and Mike, who did themselves a nice little deal.

They also employed Mrs. Spiers and Mr. Shaw's secretary, Mrs. Lannigan, who appeared to be available for appointment as directors at the drop of a hat, to out-vote any directors unhappy with their plans. They also involved Mr. Michael Spiers senior—the father of Michael Spiers. I presume that those people also benefited from the Ken and Mike executive pension fund.

As a result, my constituents and those of my hon. Friend will have much-reduced pensions unless the Government act to help them—as I hope they will after this debate. Not only is there a shortfall of as much as £2 million in the pension fund as a consequence of Shaw's and Spiers's various activities, which must surely border on the criminal and appear to have been initiated with deliberate criminal intent, but the cost of the investigations undertaken by the independent trustee, the Lord Benchure Trust Corporation, must be met from the pension fund. The trust estimates that that will cost around £800,000, which will be a first call on the assets left in the fund. There will also be a bill for value added tax at 17.5 per cent. on the costs incurred by the Lord Benchure Trust and its associates in investigating the matter.

We want the Minister to give hard answers. We have heard that, due to lack of resources, Shaw and Spiers are free to continue as company directors, and that apparently no action will be taken against them. The report available from the Department of Trade and Industry—although we cannot gain access to it—warrants the facts being reported to the Serious Fraud Office. We questioned why the Lord Benchure Trust did not do so. It said that its main responsibility is to ensure maximum recovery of moneys in the interests of scheme members, and that it does not plan to make a referral. Can the Minister help with that matter?

As well as recovering what is rightfully theirs, the pensioners want justice. I hope that the Minister will give some hope that the Government will intervene to bring Shaw and Spiers to justice. At the minimum, surely the Government cannot take as much as £140,000 in VAT from the fund and our constituents.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on securing this Adjournment debate on the important subject of pensions, which is much to the fore in terms of public interest and discussion. The matters to which they referred are of great concern to their constituents, and are matters of concern generally. I am glad that we have this opportunity to debate them, although I am sorry that the necessity to do so has arisen in respect of the instant case.

In responding to the debate, I begin by extending the Government's sympathies to those of the hon. Member's constituents who have been affected by the failure of Teampace Holdings Ltd. and the apparent shortfall in that holding company's pension fund.

I am well aware of the distress and anxiety caused by circumstances such as those. I do not suppose that any Member of Parliament will, in the course of his time here, fail to encounter such regrettable circumstances. We have seen the problems writ large in the Maxwell case, but for the individuals concerned in Teampace, the position is just as serious. I fully understand the vigour with which the hon. Members have pressed the claims of their constituents.

Following the Maxwell affair, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security set up the pension law review committee under Professor Goode, whose report has been widely welcomed. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not more welcoming during his remarks. The report marks a great step forward. Last Thursday, my right hon. Friend commended his White Paper to the House. It confirms that he has decided to implement, as quickly as possible, all the committee's main proposals to reform the legal framework of occupational pensions.

My right hon. Friend confirmed that his top priority was to restore confidence in the security of pension schemes. Legislation is required to help that process. It will reinforce trust law as the basis for pensions law; it will tighten up scheme management and administrative arrangements; it will give scheme members more influence in the running of their schemes; it will introduce a minimum solvency requirement to ensure the adequacy of pension fund assets; and a strong regulator will be appointed. I should be surprised if the hon. Gentleman did not welcome each of those ingredients of the proposed reform.

Crucial to the defence against fraud are the trustees of any pension scheme, whose clear duty is to act in the interests of the trust members. Clearer guidelines for

trustees on the day-to-day managements of schemes and the prudent standard of care required for a scheme's investment strategy will be placed on statute.

The timely and accurate payment of contributions is essential for the well-being of any scheme. Trustees will be required to draw up, with employers, a schedule for payment of contributions. If any employer fails to adhere to the schedule, the trustees will be required to pursue non-payment with the employer and to advise the regulator and scheme members. Professionals, such as auditors and actuaries, will report to the trustees, not to the employer, and will have a duty to whistleblow to the regulator.

The occupational pensions regulator will have a wide range of powers and sanctions to be used to enforce statutory requirements. He will be able to investigate all schemes and to require those responsible for them to take appropriate action. In addition, the regulator will have the power to suspend, remove or disqualify trustees where appropriate. More serious breaches of statutory requirements will be made criminal offences, to emphasise the importance that the Government attach to them and to act as a deterrent.

If, despite all those measures, fraud occurs and the employer is insolvent and cannot meet the loss, a compensation scheme, limited to the lower of 90 per cent. of the missing assets or the amount required to restore a scheme to 90 per cent. of its solvency level, will operate.

I agree with my right hon. Friend that the proposed legal framework outlined in his White Paper will enhance the security of occupational pension entitlement and confidence in it. Had such a scheme been in existence at the material time of the Teampace problems, perhaps the unfortunate circumstances so well described by the hon. Members might have been avoided, at least for the pension fund beneficiaries who will otherwise suffer because of the deficiency.

On the question of directors' disqualification, the following are the facts of the matter. On 8 January 1992, two insolvency practitioner partners of KPMG Peat Marwick were appointed joint administrative receivers of Teampace Holdings Ltd., the group holding company, and of the subsidiary companies in the group of which Burmans of Kings Norton was one. The administrative receivers were appointed by the group's bankers.

The Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 provides that, when a company goes into administrative receivership, the insolvency practitioner concerned has a duty to report to the Secretary of State if it appears that the conduct of any director makes him unfit to take part in the management of a company. So that the administrative receiver can have time to consider all the relevant facts, the legislation allows him up to six months in which to make his report.

In the case of Teampace Holdings Ltd., the joint administrative receivers submitted an interim return in May 1992 which indicated that at that time they did not have sufficient information to form an opinion about the directors' conduct. They anticipated submitting a full report in January 1993; that report was actually received by the disqualification unit in April 1993.

As the hon. Members for Northfield and for Selly Oak will be aware from the letter that I wrote to them on 22 June, it is not our practice to divulge the detail of such reports: they are privileged, and any disclosure of the detail of their contents would militate against full and frank reporting by insolvency practitioners. Such reporting is, of course, essential if proper decisions are to be made about when disqualification proceedings are in the public interest.

I can confirm, however, that the administrative receivers' report identified what they considered to be aspects of misconduct on the part of the principal directors of Teampace, Mr. Shaw and Mr. Spiers. Those gentlemen were also the sole trustees of the group's pension scheme, which now appears to have a major deficiency of assets.

When the administrative receivers' report was received in the disqualification unit, it was identified as a serious category A case. At that time, however, the unit was dealing with a substantial increase in the number of reports being received from insolvency practitioners relating to the peak in creditors' voluntary liquidations and receiverships in 1992-93.

That reflected the progress of the recession: recessions always bring an increase in the number of insolvencies, receiverships and so forth, and there was a peak of insolvency cases at the peak—or rather the trough—of this one. A large number of such cases had been identified as being as serious as, or more serious than, that of Teampace Holdings. The Insolvency Service disqualification unit must make judgments about priorities, and decide which cases are the most urgent. Prioritising the use of resources in the unit meant that, unfortunately, the Teampace Holdings case was not dealt with.

I understand, however, that the new independent trustees of the pension scheme have recovered a property that was transferred out of the pension fund as a result of legal action against the former trustees.

Mr. Burden: Before the Minister moves on to the recovery of any property or moneys by the independent trustees, may I press him further on why his Department did not take action? He said that the Teampace case was regarded as a category A problem—in other words, a high-priority problem. Yet—let us be clear about this—other priorities prevented the taking of any action that could have led to the disqualification of Shaw and Spiers until it was too late to do so.

If the insolvency unit did not have sufficient resources to deal with such problems, what action has been taken by the unit, the Minister himself or the Government to ensure that more resources are put in? Why are there always resources with which to promote the Government's latest deregulation scheme, but none with which to bring crooks to justice?

Mr. Hamilton: I shall deal shortly with the increase in cash resources made available to the Insolvency Service, and the longer-term options for restructuring the service to permit greater flexibility to cope with the peaks and troughs that arise from the progress of business cycles—particularly in connection with recessions—which I hope will reduce the possibility of such cases occurring in the future. I want to adhere to the structure of my speech, however, so that the pieces hang together.

I referred to the recovery of property by the independent trustees. As a result, further legal action against Mr. Shaw and Mr. Spiers is possible. I also understand that the company's claims against Mr. Shaw and Mr. Spiers have been settled by the administrative receivers.

As I have said, the recession caused a substantial increase in the work load of the Insolvency Service and its official receivers. In 1989-90, there were about 13,000

[Mr. Hamilton]

cases, but in 1992-93 that number had risen to about 42,700. That was a big increase in the number of cases in a relatively short time, and it meant that resources were increasingly taken up in case administration and diverted from what I would see as the service's principal task—that of investigation.

The hon. Members for Northfield and for Selly Oak will no doubt be aware of the inquiry conducted into directors' disqualification by the Public Accounts Committee, following the publication of a National Audit Office report. The Committee's report and the Government's response to it have been laid before the House today, and will be published tomorrow. I can say that the report has been welcomed, and that there has been an urgent response to the criticisms contained in it.

Clearly, no regulatory agency can guarantee to institute proceedings in every case of suspected misconduct, especially when an agency's work load is subject to the sort of substantial short-term variations that the Insolvency Service has seen. However, for 1994-95, against the background of a reduced number of new cases and a significant increase in its resources, the service expects to increase the number of disqualification proceedings instituted against directors of failed companies where there is evidence of misconduct.

Official receivers will place greater emphasis on disqualification and prosecution work, and there will be an increased use of private sector professionals. At the same time, the specialist resources of the disqualification unit will be strengthened so as to allow increased concentration on unfitted conduct reports from insolvency practitioners.

There is a range of shorter-term responses to the PAC's criticisms that we are determined to make. I am concerned, however, that in the longer term the Insolvency Service and its official receivers should not find themselves diverted from their investigative tasks by any unexpected and unwelcome short-term increase in the number of compulsory insolvencies with which they have to deal.

That is why we have asked the consultants Stoy Hayward to look at the possibility of the private sector's taking on the routine mechanical processing work involved in insolvency administration, thereby offering the possibility of releasing the official receiver and his specialist staff for increased investigative work. Stoy Hayward first reported at the end of October 1993, to the effect that the involvement of the private sector was feasible.

The second phase of the firm's work—a more detailed study of the costs and benefits of involving the private sector—is coming to a conclusion, and a report is due by the end of July. Clearly, value for money will be paramount in any decision on involvement of the private sector in the work of the official receivers, but I look to the involvement of the private sector to provide the flexibility necessary to cope with the short-term peaks in work load that produced the problems for the service in connection with cases such as that of Teampace.

In securing the passage of the Insolvency Act 1986 and the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, the Government gave statutory form to their commitment to ensuring that those who abuse the privilege of limited liability can be made personally liable—through actions for wrongful trading—or can be prevented from enjoying that privilege for a set period—by being disqualified. The 1986 legislation provided the statutory underpinning for refocusing the Insolvency Service's and the official receiver's role on investigation.

In the years to 1991-92, considerable success was achieved in prosecution and disqualification. The more than 2,000 individuals who have been disqualified can bear witness to that. Then, as I have already said, the dramatic and prolonged increase in the Insolvency Service's work load over the recent recession interrupted the progress being made.

The service's task is now to refocus its investigative expertise so as to ensure that those guilty of misconduct in relation to their own or their company's affairs are detected and punished. I am confident that the measures that I have outlined will enable that to happen, and will help to avoid a repetition of the cyclical difficulties that we have discussed tonight.

I do not have what Opposition Members will regard as a convincing explanation of what happened in the case that has been raised, and I deeply regret that, notwithstanding the high priority assigned to that case, it was not possible to take action against the directors, if the advice had been to do so, within the period for taking such corrective action specified in the legislation.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Can the Minister give hope to our constituents that some action will at least be attempted to bring Messrs Shaw and Spiers to book for their actions, and that the Government will help in some way to meet the shortfall in the pension scheme?

Mr. Hamilton: The two years allowed for the taking of disqualification proceedings elapsed on 7 January this year, and as that period—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 June 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL [*Lords*]. (*By Order.*)

Order for consideration read.
To be considered on Thursday 7 July.

FEDERATION OF STREET TRADERS UNION (LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES ACT 1990) (AMENDMENT) BILL. (*By Order.*)

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 7 July.

FINAL REPORT OF THE MAY INQUIRY

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Final Report of the Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the convictions arising out of the bomb attacks in Guildford and Woolwich in 1974, by the Right honourable Sir John May.—[*Mr. Howard.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Corporation Tax

1. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he takes in setting the corporation tax rate in Britain of that of the United Kingdom's major competitors; and if he will make a statement.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer pays careful attention to the corporation tax rates in the United Kingdom's major competitor countries. The United Kingdom's main rate of corporation tax is the lowest of any major industrial country.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my hon. Friend confirm that not only do we have the lowest rate of corporation tax for larger firms of any country in the European Community, but our corporation tax regime for smaller firms is also the most generous in the whole of Europe? Is it not also true that the Labour party is pledged to increase the rate of tax on businesses and make them closer to the levels in other Community countries, which would increase business costs and destroy jobs?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right on each count. The socialist manifesto for the European elections made precisely the commitment to which he refers. My hon. Friend is also right to say that our corporation tax rates compare well with those elsewhere in the world. That is partly why we have such a successful record in attracting inward investment, which has created more than half a million jobs in Britain over the past 14 years.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If everything is so wonderful, why do we have a trade deficit?

Mr. Dorrell: Part of the reason why we have falling unemployment, and inflation under better control than at any time for a quarter of a century, is that the Government have taken the decisions necessary to put economic disciplines in place. That is why the economic forecast published this week gives one of the best outlooks for the British economy in living memory.

Inflation

2. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current rate of inflation in the United Kingdom; and what is the rate for France, Germany and Italy.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): Inflation in the United Kingdom is currently 2.6 per cent. That compares with 1.7 per cent. in France, 3 per cent. in Germany and 4.1 per cent. in Italy.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful reply. It is clear that the policies being pursued by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government have resulted in inflation falling significantly below the European Community average. Does my hon. Friend agree that low inflation is the foundation for economic growth and that economic growth equals more jobs and greater prosperity for all the British people?

Mr. Nelson: Yes, I agree. Our economic performance, not least on inflation, is the envy of the rest of Europe. Certainly the European Commission expects the United Kingdom to be the only country to combine stronger growth with low inflation both this year and next.

Interest Rates

3. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current policy on interest rates.

8. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding interest rates.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The minutes of my discussions with the Governor which precede my decisions on interest rates are now published. I refer both hon. Members to the minutes published on 22 June.

Mr. Griffiths: If there is any confidence in the Chancellor's policies, why are longer-term interest rates in this country rising faster than those in Italy, America, Germany, France and other comparable countries?

Mr. Clarke: There has been some rise in long-term interest rates throughout the western world. In my opinion, that has happened because the markets have overreacted to fears of inflation in north America and across western

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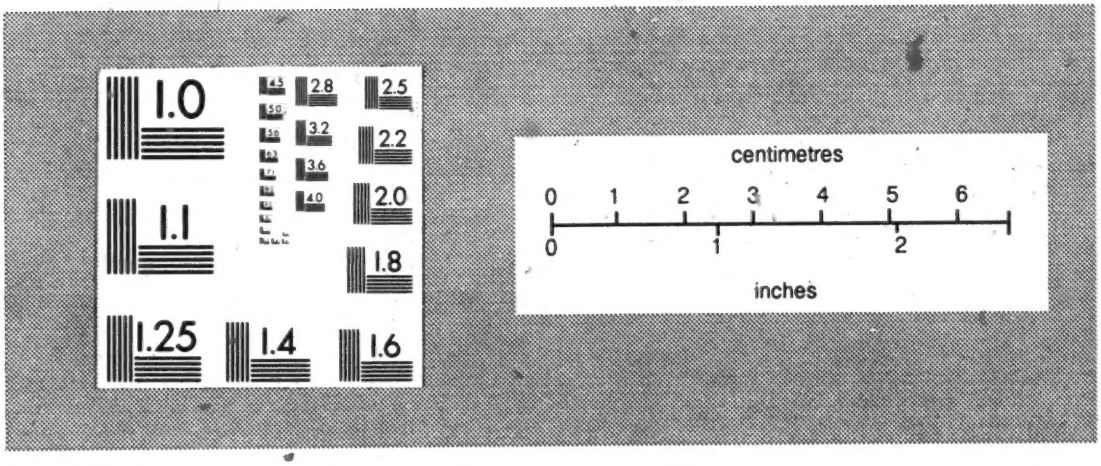

Europe. The best reaction that I can give is the one that I am giving—to introduce the most open system of monetary policy in the world, so that people can see that we are setting our monetary policy on a basis that will deliver the low inflation target to which the Government are committed. The exchanges a few moments ago made it clear that we are well on the way to delivering that.

Mr. Skinner: At the beginning of this year, the interest rate on 10-year bonds in Britain was just over 6 per cent. It is now almost 8½ per cent. That is a massive increase by any standards, and higher than that in most industrialised countries. Does that not mean that the next move in interest rates will be up and not down? That will mean more unemployment. We have more taxes at the end of this year and more taxes next year. The best advice that I can give the Chancellor is to take the Chief Secretary with him to the meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England because the Chief Secretary is telling a story in other parts of the world different from the one that the Chancellor is spreading here.

Mr. Clarke: Apparently, the Chief Secretary and I have to go to Spain and Germany respectively before anyone takes any notice of our speeches. Leaving that to one side, however, the fact is that we have the lowest short-term rates in this country since 1972. Since the beginning of this year, long-term rates have gone up, for the reasons I have just given. As the hon. Gentleman knows, however, they have come down again to the present level of about 8½ per cent., and they will stay down if we can make it clear to the markets that we have control of inflation, as we most undoubtedly have. We do not have a problem, because the fundamentals are more sound than they have been here for a generation. Indeed, I have just revised upwards my forecast for economic growth and revised downwards my forecast for inflation because we have the best combination of circumstances for the medium future that we have had for many years.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will my right hon. and learned Friend continue to remind his advisers, especially those in the Bank of England, that the present weakness of the United States dollar against the Japanese yen and European currencies is not a cause for a fundamental reappraisal of our policy of trying to get lower short-term interest rates? The weakness results from the delay, caused by the Japanese financial year window-dressing—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. A question, please.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does my right hon. and learned Friend understand that the weakness results from the repatriation of Japanese yen on the sale of US Treasury bills, some of which funds are now being put into European investment instruments, because the Japanese expect European interest rates to continue to fall?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will take that point forward in long conversations for the remainder of the afternoon. Our position in the exchange markets has been extremely steady. Our position is well appreciated abroad because we have the fundamentals right. I will continue to set British monetary policy on the basis of British conditions, looking at our money supply, our asset values and our exchange rates, and getting the balance right in strengthening recovery which can be sustained because it is based on a low target for inflation. We are well on course for that at the moment.

Madam Speaker: After those long exchanges, I would like a direct question from Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I will endeavour to oblige, Madam Speaker. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that stability in interest rates at the short end is entirely dependent on his maintaining the current fiscal balance to avoid there being a return of inflationary fears? That means not only a restraint on public expenditure, but a continuation of the current policy towards taxation.

Mr. Clarke: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Beith: To make that absolutely clear, does the Chancellor agree that the pressure to use higher interest rates to restrain inflation will be very much greater if, at a time when the economy is becoming more active, there is the expectation of tax cuts? Had he better not warn those of his hon. Friends, other than the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), that the expectation of tax cuts could damage his chances of keeping interest rates down?

Mr. Clarke: The need for brevity has prevented me from being as expansive as I would have wished, both to my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) and to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). There is a very great deal in what they say. That is why I keep reiterating my determination to deliver our fiscal policies and to return to this Government's agenda of tax cutting only when it is sensible to do so because we have public spending and public borrowing under control through the prudent combination of policies that we are now pursuing.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledge that many of us are very relieved to hear that monetary conditions in this country will be set according to British conditions? If there were ever such a disaster as a single currency, for which my right hon. and learned Friend has been campaigning for the past 30 years, would we not then have our monetary policy set according to European conditions?

Mr. Clarke: I missed my hon. Friend in Bonn, as he has heard me on that subject many times before over the past 20 or 30 years, but he will be glad to know that I did not take the matter any further yesterday. I made it clear that we would address the subject only in the context of the views of the British Parliament of that time and that I thought that the Bundestag and the Bundesrat of the day would expect the same right if ever the same situation arose. I believe that the German constitutional court would insist on that. I said to my German audience that in my opinion we were right to opt out of the artificial timetable towards economic monetary union, and that events have proved us right. I also said that it was a waste of time going back to blueprints for economic and monetary union, and that we should get on with the business of convergence on low inflation and healthy public finances. As usual, I was commended by my German audience for my frankness and candour in explaining the British position to them.

Mr. Gordon Brown: On the Chancellor's speech in Bonn last night, and on the question not so much of a Britain at the heart of Europe as of divisions at the heart of

the Treasury, will the Chancellor now take the opportunity to disown the view of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that

"a single currency threatens our sovereignty, is unwanted, is impossible and the principle unacceptable"

— yes or no?

Mr. Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary tells me that that is not an accurate quotation. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is obviously doing myself and my right hon. Friend the courtesy of actually reading our speeches, as opposed to the interpretation put on them. He will profit by doing so and he will see clearly from both our speeches what the consistent policy of the Government is towards the kind of arrangements in the European Union that we British Conservatives want to see and which we demonstrated last weekend that we are determined to attain.

Budget Deficit

4. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many years it will take, on current tax and growth rates, to eliminate the budget deficit.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): In the Budget, the public sector borrowing requirement was projected to fall rapidly over the next few years and to be broadly in balance by 1998-99.

Mr. Trimble: That is a simple calculation on certain assumptions and not a forecast which, of course, would be subject to the same vagaries and infirmities as are normal in Treasury forecasts. Is it not the case that if we have to wait until 1998-99 to get the Budget under control, there will be no scope for the sort of tax cuts on which the Chief Secretary's friends are dependent, unless there is either an increase in the rate of growth or a significant reduction in expenditure?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to vagaries; that is why the Budget Red Book sets out a series of different cases with higher and lower growth. If we had higher growth, the PSBR would obviously be eliminated somewhat earlier. The hon. Gentleman is simply underlining what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has already said—that there can be no question of tax cuts until it is prudent for that to be considered by the Government.

Mr. Sykes: Does my right hon. Friend think that growth rates in this country will be helped by yesterday's disgraceful rail strike and does he agree with the Labour Front-Bench spokesman who recently described Jimmy Knapp as a hero?

Mr. Portillo: It is most extraordinary to have a rail strike being inflicted on the British travelling public and to see the failure by those people who are contending for the Labour party leadership to condemn outright the strike, the damage that it is doing to the British economy and the inconvenience that it is causing to the British people.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Given the impact of the European economy on domestic growth rates, does the Chief Secretary believe in a single currency in principle —yes or no?

Mr. Portillo: I have nothing to add to what I said on that subject before. My right hon. Friend and learned Friend the Chancellor and I have both made it perfectly clear from the Dispatch Box that that will be a matter for decision by this Parliament if and when the matter is put to Britain, which will not be in this Parliament but in a future British Parliament.

Retail Prices Index

5. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which were the last two calendar years in which the retail prices index remained below 2 per cent. for the entire year.

16. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which last two years the retail prices index last remained below 2 per cent. for the entire calendar year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Only two calendar years since the war have seen the headline inflation rate below 2 per cent. in every month; 1993 was one, and we have to go back almost 50 years to 1946 for the other.

Mrs. Gillan: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that since 1990 the average family mortgage bill has fallen by £37 per week? Does he agree that new house buyers and the housing market in general are being severely hampered by high interest rates on long-term borrowing? When will the financial market wake up to our policy of low inflation and reduce interest rates on long-term borrowing?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. The main practical impact so far of higher long-term rates as a result of the fall in bonds has been a raising of the level of fixed-rate mortgages, which are becoming very popular, which has flattened off demand—temporarily, I am sure —in the housing market in this country. Obviously, we need to see stability in the financial markets for that reason and for many other reasons. Our best contribution to stability is to keep emphasising that the fundamentals are right in this country and that we are committed both to healthy public finances and to continuing to meet our low inflation target. I repeat our commitment to do that.

Mr. Jenkin: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his record on inflation. Inflation expectations are lower than they were at the time of the last Budget, and lower again than at the time when public expenditure totals were settled in last year's public spending round. At a time of such low inflation, how can we justify such large prospective increases in public expenditure as 4.6 per cent. next year and 6.2 per cent. the year after that? Should we not put the brakes on?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right about the direction of inflation. Everyone has been revising downward their forecasts for inflation—not only the Treasury, but independent forecasters, my panel of advisers, and so on —as the year has gone on. Among other things, that offers beneficial prospects for the level of public spending. Last year's public spending round took £15 billion out of our then public spending plans, and the Cabinet has just agreed to confirm the figures that we have published as ceilings for the coming round. We are all determined to ensure that we deliver as tight a fiscal policy as is consistent with unavoidable expenditure and our policy commitments in the coming autumn round.

Mr. Sheldon: Will the Chancellor recall the evidence given by the Governor of the Bank of England to the

Treasury and Civil Service Committee when my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) called the Governor an "inflation nutter"? Without agreeing with the words used by my hon. Friend on that occasion, does the Chancellor agree that by publishing so fully the details of his discussions with the Governor he has put much of the weight on the Governor of the Bank of England, to his own discredit and disadvantage? Is it not clear that there are other matters, such as investment incentives for manufacturing industry, which should be playing a larger part in the Government's policies?

Mr. Clarke: We believe that low inflation is an essential prerequisite for growth, prosperity and jobs in this country. That is why we are aiming at sustained recovery, but with low inflation to underpin it and give it a better chance of permanence. I commend to the right hon. Gentleman the minutes of the exchanges that I have with the Governor, from which he will see how much we agree on the conditions that we have to balance and bear in mind. The right hon. Gentleman may then better understand why we have been so successful over the past 12 months in getting the balance so right that the rate of growth exceeded the rate of inflation last year, which has happened in only four years since 1970 and plainly will do so again in 1994.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Chancellor agree that there has been a huge rise in those items that could be termed the basic necessities of life, such as water rates, council house rents and, of course, energy costs as a result of the imposition of value added tax on fuel, which affect people on low incomes disproportionately and are not affected so much by the retail prices index?

Mr. Clarke: Within the retail prices index at any given stage, some items go up faster than others. In fact, energy prices have gone down compared with other prices in most of the past few years. The poorer sections of society and all retirement pensions have, of course, been cushioned against the effects of VAT on fuel by the compensation in the Budget.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is not the Government's excellent record threatened by the ever-increasing and inflationary demands from Brussels? Has the Chancellor seen the paper put privately before the Select Committee this week which said that our gross contribution in 1995 will rise by £2,000 million—or £3 per week per family—and that it has been calculated that the agricultural budget will break through the legal limits imposed at Edinburgh by more than £1,000 million. Is there nothing that we can do to contain that extravagance and the inflation coming to us from Brussels?

Mr. Clarke: The Edinburgh ceilings are tight—much tighter than those that the Commission was demanding, and far below its minimum expectations—and they will be strictly adhered to. I say that not just on behalf of this Government, but on behalf of other Governments who are determined to ensure that we see those ceilings applied in practice.

The variations from year to year to which my hon. Friend refers are largely caused by fluctuations in the pattern of payments. Different payments come in different years, causing an up and down fluctuation. *[Interruption.]* I cannot possibly give the list of causes for that, but one of the key causes is that our partners' financial year—the calendar year—is not the same as ours. Payments therefore fluctuate wildly from one year to other. *[Interruption.]* Some people can never be convinced. Anyone who knows the Edinburgh ceilings knows that the idea that they are responsible for a further £2 billion of contributions is palpable nonsense.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Given the interrelationship between European monetary policy and the rate of inflation, will the Chancellor now stop shuffling around and tell the House whether he agrees with the Chief Secretary, who said in a GMTV interview on the question of a single currency that for him, "That's impossible"? Does the Chancellor agree or not?

Mr. Clarke: I did not hear the interview, but my experience is that quotations from interviews by the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members are likely to be wildly misleading and are unlikely to be accurate.

When we discuss economic and monetary union in Europe—whichever Minister is involved—we point out how right we were to opt out of the timetable and that we must get on with convergence on low inflation and healthy public finances, and not fresh blueprints for union. We make it quite clear that if ever the issue comes back of going to stage 3 of economic and monetary union, it will come to the British Parliament of the day. I wholly agree with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary in that I do not remotely believe that that will be the Parliament of which we are currently all Members.

Mr. Batiste: Against the background of low inflation, is it not clear that inflationary pay demands in the public sector simply cannot be accepted? Would it not support the international perception of sterling as a strong currency if Opposition Front-Bench Members would condemn inflationary pay demands?

Mr. Clarke: The level of pay settlements in the public sector is consistent with our success in getting inflation under control, our control of public spending and our developing better quality services as private industry recovers with the same level of settlements also.

I find it absolutely incredible that the Labour party, which is posing as a responsible and modernised party, cannot bring itself even to say that an 11 per cent. interim claim based on alleged past improvements should be condemned. Quite plainly, as has been pointed out, the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen are openly supporting industrial action against the public in support of such a claim.

Local Authority Capital Receipts

6. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is proposing to relax the current restrictions on the proportion of local authority capital receipts which can be applied for investment in housing and other capital projects.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has no such plans.

Mr. Raynsford: Why are the Chief Secretary and his colleagues at the Department of the Environment so negative? The Prime Minister rightly pointed out that too many people are begging on our streets because they have no homes. Is it not time to get the unemployed back to

work building the homes needed for the homeless and to release local authority capital receipts to make that possible?

Mr. Portillo: We are not in the least bit negative. The fact that 179,000 social housing units are being provided over three years, which is well in excess of our manifesto commitment, rather proves that point. What we are positive about is controlling public sector borrowing. We are positive about establishing stable economic conditions, but the Labour party does not even understand that terminology.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that local authority receipts should first be applied to paying off the appalling debts of local authorities controlled by the Labour party? Does he agree that it is those spendthrift authorities—put in power by the supporters of the Labour party, who frequently do not pay their council tax—that are unable to budget properly and provide proper housing, which should be condemned?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is right. The local authorities whose spending of receipts is being controlled are those authorities that have large debts. They ran up those debts generally in the 1930s and the 1960s in order to build houses. When those authorities sell those houses again, it is not appropriate for them to retain the same level of debt. That is rather like saying that if someone borrows to buy a house he can have a large mortgage, but that if he sells that house and does not buy another one, it is, of course, no longer appropriate for him to continue to hold that level of mortgage. It is absolutely absurd for the Labour party to believe that those receipts can be spent without increasing public spending and public borrowing.

Negative Equity

7. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the impact of the rate of inflation on negative equity in the housing market.

Mr. Nelson: House prices have clearly increased since their trough in the first half of 1993, reducing negative equity. The latest estimate is that the number of households with negative equity has fallen by nearly 30 per cent. since the first quarter of 1993.

Mr. Battle: The housing market continues to bump along in the depths of the recession. Is not the Minister aware that 800 families lose their homes through repossession every week? Is not he aware that one in 17 families are in serious arrears with their mortgages and that 1.5 million families have negative equity on their homes? Does not he accept that the Chief Secretary's proposals to abolish or further restrict income support payments to home owners who lose their jobs will not only kill off the housing market but throw thousands of families on to the streets?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman should check his facts, particularly about the number of people with negative equity, because there are now 500,000 fewer people with negative equity and he should welcome that. The fact is that court repossessions have fallen by 55 per cent. since 1991 and arrears have been reduced by nearly 10 per cent. The hon. Gentleman should welcome those improvements instead of suggesting that we should in some way inflate the property market to try to get rid of negative equity. That would be no answer to the problems of those with negative equity.

Mr. Waterson: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major reasons why the level of negative equity and debt overhang is coming down so rapidly, contrary to what the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has suggested, is that many people have prudently maintained their monthly payments at the same level even though interest rates have been falling?

Mr. Nelson: Yes. Many people have been able to reduce their negative equity, not so much because house prices have increased but because they have been able to reduce their indebtedness. The fact that we have been able to get interest rates down by such a significant extent is worth £160 a month off mortgage payments. That has meant that, in many cases, people have been able to reduce the negative equity in their property. That is reflected in the excellent figures and progress to which I referred earlier.

Mr. Darling: Does the Chancellor agree with the Governor of the Bank of England's assessment that interest rates are likely to rise? If that is the case, what will that do to the housing market and to the recovery?

Mr. Nelson: I never speculate, and nor will my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the future level of interest rates. What we do say is that the prospects for a revival in house prices—a gentle, not a massively inflationary increase—and the prospects for improving activity and transaction in that market are more likely to be served by a sound and steady recovery in the economy. We are seeing just that and it is clearly illustrated in the summer economic forecast published earlier this week. All that suggests that the forecasts, not just of the Government but of outside organisations such as the house builders, that house prices will continue to rise this year and next, will be met to the health and welfare of the housing market and home owners.

Mr. Duncan: In view of the Chancellor's two most recent speeches, will my hon. Friend convey to him my particular congratulations on his Mansion House speech? Does he accept that the question calls for a dangerous regime in which people will be deluded about the value of their assets? They will consider their houses as a source of riches on which they can regularly draw, but, in reality, they will achieve an economy in which productive resources are denied the long-term investment which this country so desperately requires.

Mr. Nelson: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that nobody in the House would seek to sustain the argument that the price of properties should consistently rise by more than inflation or the economy as a whole. Such a course would simply divert resources into fixed rather than productive assets. There would also be serious implications for first-time buyers, for whom properties would become much less affordable. There must be a relationship between the growth of the economy, the level of inflation and house prices. We do not want that to get out of synch.

VAT (Fuel)

9. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to introducing measures to reverse the increase in VAT on fuel in April 1995.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): Parliament considered that matter and legislated last year.

Mr. Harvey: As the Government are committed to reducing taxation when economic circumstances allow, will they give a commitment to the House today that, when that happy day is reached, their first priority will not be to attract headlines by cutting income tax but rather to reduce VAT on domestic fuel?

Sir John Cope: We give no commitments of that sort in advance. In any case, is it not interesting that only a few minutes ago the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was urging caution on my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor as regards tax cuts?

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind the generous compensation that has been provided to all pensioners for VAT on fuel, will my right hon. Friend have a word with the Secretary of State for Social Security to ensure that it is presented separately on pension books, because that would help me with my constituency correspondence?

Sir John Cope: I agree with my hon. Friend that the compensation is generous. I will pass on his suggestion to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Mr. Winnick: Does not the Minister understand the tremendous hardship already being caused by the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel? If that is not to be reversed, the Government should at least not impose the further measure in 1996, which will cause untold hardship, despite the Government's claims that those who need help are receiving it. The measure has been a great burden, which helps to explain the Tories' deep unpopularity in the country.

Sir John Cope: I do not quite follow the reference to 1996. Whatever the hon. Gentleman was thinking about, I understand the point that he makes. But he knows as well as anyone else that we do not make comments before the Budget.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my right hon. Friend remind those European enthusiasts on the Opposition Benches that an energy tax is part of Europe's policy? Will he also remind them that the Government have been elected since 1979 on a policy of diverting direct taxes to indirect taxes, and that VAT is an indirect tax?

Sir John Cope: My hon. Friend is right. The carbon energy tax supported by the Opposition, particularly by the Liberals, would be a severe imposition on ordinary people.

Income Level Disparities

10. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of Government policies on changes in disparities in income levels during the 1980s.

Mr. Clarke: Government policies are focused on improving incentives and encouraging business enterprise. That is the only way to ensure improved living standards for all.

Mr. Betts: Has the Chancellor read any of the reports produced recently which show that income disparities grew during the 1980s? For example, the "Economic Trends" survey shows that the poorest 20 per cent. of the population saw their share of disposable income fall from 10 to 7 per cent. during the 1980s; and the Institute of Fiscal Studies report shows that the poorest 10 per cent. of the population saw their real incomes fall by 15 per cent. during the 1980s. Does the Chancellor accept that all those reports show that the increase in unemployment, the transfer from high-paid skilled jobs to low-paid unskilled jobs, and the switch to indirect taxation have hit the poorest in the community the hardest and are responsible for the increased disparity? Will he accept Government responsibility for those matters, and will he explain to the House whether they are a result of Government incompetence or a deliberate result of their economic policies, for which he and his colleagues should be thoroughly ashamed?

Mr. Clarke: Many of the studies to which the hon. Gentleman refers in his question are, in my opinion, a complete misuse of the statistical information available to us. Average incomes have increased by 35 per cent. in the time that the Conservatives have been in office. The increase has obviously varied at different levels, but average incomes for all sections of society have increased by about 35 per cent. in real terms. That is after a period when they were very static, in the 1970s. It is true that there has been a widening of incomes, although there have been increases at all levels—

Mr. Betts: There have not.

Mr. Clarke: It is true. That is why we are giving such priority to raising education standards, raising the level of skills and putting in place the new system of national vocational qualifications. In a modern economy, there will be a widening of that gap, and one has to give more people the skills that they require.

The research that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, which talks about the bottom 10 per cent., is totally misleading. That group always includes many people who declare that they have had absolutely no income of any type during the year. They include self-employed people who have accounts for that year showing a loss. If one examines individual groups, all wage-earners' real incomes have increased. People on benefit have done better. Pensioners' incomes have increased by 40 per cent. The 1980s was a period when, throughout the social spectrum, people in this country became very much better off.

Mr. Paice: Is not what really matters to those people on lower incomes the absolute income, not the comparison with higher levels, which is simply the politics of envy? Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell me whether there is anywhere in the world where a policy of making the rich poorer has succeeded in making the poor richer?

Mr. Clarke: I can remember one country, which is the United Kingdom, where a policy of trying to do that did immeasurable harm to the economy, and immeasurable harm to the incomes of most groups in the country, during

the 1970s. It is obvious, from the questions that Labour Members ask, that the Labour party would revert to that policy again if ever it had the chance.

Ms Harman: In view of the anger and dismay in the country about the prospect of VAT on gas and electricity increasing from 8 to 17·5 per cent. in April, is the Chancellor prepared to reconsider that increase on VAT on gas and electricity, or is he still determined to press ahead with it?

Mr. Clarke: The increase has already gone ahead. It has been accompanied by compensation for poor groups and all retirement pensioners, although, as my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General said, not all of them appreciate that it was added to an uprating which was quite low because inflation is now so low. Parliament has approved the second stage of the introduction of VAT on fuel, and it will be accompanied by a parallel package of compensation, which will again ensure that all retirement pensioners and all people on benefit will be compensated for the costs.

Tax Reductions

11. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in support of tax reductions.

Mr. Dorrell: I receive representations on many aspects of taxation.

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend will be aware that Britain's gross contribution to the European Community Budget is already the equivalent of more than 3p on the standard rate of income tax. He may also be aware that the amount of Britain's net contribution to the European Budget almost exactly equates to the amount that the Irish Republic draws out of the Community. Does he agree that curbing expenditure in that area would not only be extremely popular with the electorate, but would create the scope for the tax cuts to which the Government are committed?

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree that curbing European Community expenditure is an important part of total budget discipline. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took the line that he did at the Edinburgh summit, where, as the Chancellor said earlier, we achieved a substantial reduction in the ceiling on the Budget that the Commission were seeking. It is also the reason why our party negotiated the rebate in the early 1980s under my right hon. Friend Baroness Thatcher, which was opposed by the Labour party. It is also why we oppose, root and branch, the proposals adopted by the Labour party in the recent European election—to increase Community expenditure.

Mr. Simpson: Does the Minister accept that arguably the greatest success of the policies that the Government have pursued in forcing down wages has been that the poorest paid people have been made increasingly dependent on means-tested benefits, and are paying marginal rates of tax of 97p in the pound? Does he accept that that is the strongest argument now for paying those people decent wages, instead of inflicting punitive marginal rates of tax on them?

Mr. Dorrell: If the Labour party were seriously interested in improving the living standards of people on the lowest incomes, I believe that it would recognise the obvious truth that has been shown by every report on the subject: the way to improve the living standards of the low income groups is to promote job creation, and any Government who are serious about that must conclude that to adopt the social chapter and a minimum wage is to march resolutely in the wrong direction. This Government are serious about wanting living standards to rise across the income scale, and we are pursuing policies that will deliver that.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Enright: Given the 16 per cent. increase in productivity since the last pay settlement achieved by the signalling staff, how does the Prime Minister justify spending £500 million and cramming money into the pockets of already wealthy bankers and PR men, when a mere 1 per cent. of that would give those signalling men a living family wage?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has overlooked the fact that the signalling men are demanding an 11 per cent. pay rise with no productivity or restructuring. That is self-evidently not a reasonable claim in present circumstances. I very much regret the fact that they rejected the Railtrack offer, and that therefore there has been continued suffering for rail travellers.

What we should like to know clearly—yes or no—is whether the Opposition believe that these strikes should continue.

Mr. Michael Brown: Does the Prime Minister recall the speech that he made at the Conservative party conference in 1992, when he asked who had ever heard of a cricketer, Len Hutton, turning out to play for the county of Humberside? Is he aware that on the table of the Secretary of State for the Environment is a recommendation to the Local Government Commission, supported by just about every Labour and Conservative Member representing Humberside, and every Labour and Conservative councillor in the area, welcoming the report? Will he urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to get rid of the county of Humberside and to implement the recommendations as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have heard that plea. I think that there are many hon. Members on both sides of the House who would like the return of traditional areas and areas of local government that people will recognise and understand as having historical interest.

Mrs. Beckett: How can the Prime Minister justify a reported pay increase of £800 a week for the chief executive of National Power, at a time when the Institute

for Fiscal Studies has shown that the gap between the best paid and the lowest paid in Britain today is wider than it has been for 100 years?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady yet again tends to concentrate on every occasion on the politics of envy and redistribution instead of the politics of growth and job creation. When she learns that there is more to prosperity than envy and redistribution, she may be in a position to lecture others.

Mrs. Beckett: I am sure that the whole country will note that the Prime Minister failed to condemn either the pay increase or the widening pay gap. But surely he is aware that Government figures show that every ordinary British family, including the lowest paid of all, are paying more taxes now than they were when the Government came to power—with the sole exception of the kind of people who award themselves pay increases of £800 a week. How can that be right?

The Prime Minister: Of course, average real incomes are substantially up for people at all levels of income, as the right hon. Lady should know. But since the right hon. Lady returns yet again to tax, perhaps she would care to comment on the remarks of the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) who said recently:

"We"—

that is the Labour party—

"cannot put trust and tax on top of the agenda and then duck the economic issues."

That is what the right hon. Lady does.

Mrs. Beckett: What are certainly up for every ordinary British family are the taxes that they pay under this Government. As a result of the Government's economic failure, Britain today is a country of low wages, low skills, high crime and higher taxes. Whatever happened to the Prime Minister's promise to build a nation at ease with itself?

The Prime Minister: It is actually a nation of low inflation, increasing growth and falling crime. The right hon. Lady has been promising to set out her position on a number of issues and today she certainly has. She has published her own policy document and it enlightens a great deal. If any hon. Member would like to know more about it, I invite them—

Hon. Members: Answer.

Madam Speaker: Order. It is right that an answer should be given, but to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) who has every right to question the Executive about its policy.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady has invited anybody who wishes to know more about her programme to phone her campaign hotline and ask for Kevin or Ian who will explain her policies.

Mr. Rowe: Will my right hon. Friend give a clear and categorical assurance to the House that he will not allow himself to be discouraged from his pursuit of a classless society by the growing probability that both the leading opposition parties will be led by public schoolboys?

The Prime Minister: The essence of the society that I wish to create lies in the fact that it does not matter whether they are or not.

Q2. **Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hill: Does the Prime Minister remember those happy Labour days of 1969 when he came to live in my Streatham constituency at the charming Primrose court when the unemployment rate in Streatham stood at one in 50? Thanks to his Government's policies it now stands at a shocking one in five. Is the Prime Minister be surprised to learn that there is no great demand in Streatham for a blue plaque to commemorate his stay at Primrose court?

The Prime Minister: I do not know how much the hon. Gentleman knows about Lambeth at that time in the late 1960s, but if he had checked a little more carefully he would have known that just a few months before the date that he quotes the Labour-controlled Lambeth council was swept from office, going from 57 to three in the local elections.

Q3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fabricant: Is not it the case that being at the heart of Europe and fighting one's corner for Europe are not mutually exclusive and, if the Opposition say that it is, is not that both false and weak? Is not it also the case that when it comes to exercising the veto or the threat of veto, other countries have used it far more often than we have and, when it comes to abiding by European directives, in the league of large countries, Britain comes top, France comes third and Germany comes bottom? Is not Germany's threat of the beef embargo a good example of that?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend intimated, there is a long history of vetoes by other member states —some on the Commission presidency itself. Being at the heart of Europe means fighting for the best interests of this country and of Europe. It emphatically does not mean agreeing with everything that our partners propose. Frankly, that is not the way that Europe works. It is not how our partners behave, how they expect us to behave or how we will behave. Wherever appropriate, we will stand up for the interests of this country and of Europe, and for the nature of Europe that we believe everyone across the continent wants.

Q4. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Prime Minister aware that figures provided by the Department of Social Security clearly show that the number of miners who fail tests for bronchitis and emphysema is well over 90 per cent? Does he share my concern that there is a need to review the regulations, not in five years or two years but immediately? Will he tell the House that he is prepared to set in train an immediate review of the bronchitis and emphysema regulations?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Government accepted and implemented in full the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council recommendation to add those diseases to the prescribed list. I am sure that was right. The recommendation was made and accepted.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that President Reagan never looked back after he fired striking air traffic controllers? In view of the wilful neglect by Labour Members to do anything to help the travelling public, will my right hon. Friend consider doing the same with the striking signalmen?

The Prime Minister: We are currently hoping to see a settlement that would end those unnecessary strikes at the earliest date possible. At the moment, Railtrack and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union are in negotiation and I hope that they will reach agreement soon.

Q5. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alton: Does the Prime Minister share the sense of horror felt by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House at the massacre of half a million Rwandans and the displacement of 2 million others? Is there not some personal initiative that he could take to ensure that the 5,000 troops promised by the United Nations one and a half months ago are now all deployed, refugees are evacuated and those responsible for the genocide are brought before international courts and tried for war crimes?

The Prime Minister: Anyone who has seen the dreadful pictures from Rwanda will share the hon. Gentleman's sense of horror and revulsion. I strongly support the proposal currently being considered by the Security Council, to establish a committee of experts to investigate allegations of war crimes in Rwanda and then take appropriate action. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, the special rapporteur on Rwanda appointed by a special session of the European Commission of Human Rights is now in the country. We expect his report tomorrow and I hope that action can swiftly follow.

Q6. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. Friend will be aware of our ambition to continue on the path of cutting the basic rate of tax. Has he contrasted that with the ambition of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)?

The Prime Minister: Our policy is entirely clear. Our overriding aim is to sustain the recovery that is now clearly evident—but when it is prudent to do so, we will certainly seek to cut tax rates again. I heard what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said about tax a day or so ago. I am delighted that he set out his position —something of a novelty, in respect of tax, for Opposition Members. I hope that all other contenders will honour their previous promises and set out what they would do about tax.

Q7. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Prime Minister recall telling his right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) last Monday that he regretted using the veto on Mr. Dehaene, and that it would have been avoided if the pre-conference preparations had been as thorough as they were in 1984? Was the Prime Minister suffering from selective amnesia or being economical with the truth in failing to tell the House that in 1984 his predecessor vetoed Claude Cheysson and supported Jacques Delors, who, unlike the Prime Minister, believes in giving workers legal protection from sweatshop employers?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman—perhaps by accident—is not telling the whole story. In 1984, there was a great amount of private consultation, and a number of countries—not just this one—indicated privately, not openly in the Council meeting, that they were unable to accept a particular candidate. My point was that if that sort of negotiation had taken place it would not have been necessary to apply the veto publicly, as I did. I hope that the hon. Gentleman now understands that.

Madam Speaker: Business question—Mr. Nick Brown.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Before the Prime Minister leaves—

Madam Speaker: Order. I take points of order after business questions.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:—

MONDAY 4 JULY—Opposition Day (16th allotted day) There will be a debate on "The Child Support Agency" on an opposition motion.

Proceedings on the following Bills, which are consolidation measures: Vehicle Excise and Registration Bill [*Lords*]; Value Added Tax Bill [*Lords*].

TUESDAY 5 JULY—Remaining stages of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 6 JULY—Remaining stages of the Education Bill [*Lords*].

Motion on the Contracts (Applicable Law) Act 1990 (Amendment) Order.

THURSDAY 7 JULY—Opposition Day (17th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled "Meeting Housing Need" on a motion in the name of Plaid Cymru; and a debate on "Payment of State Benefits to Young People" on a motion in the name of the Scottish National party.

FRIDAY 8 JULY—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 11 JULY—Opposition Day (18th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee 'B' will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 6 July to consider European Community document No. 5475/94 relating to trans-European Networks.

[Wednesday 6 July: European Standing Committee B—European Community document: 10635/93, 5475/94 Trans-European Networks. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 48-xvi (1993-94).]?

Mr. Brown: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement, and for the Opposition days that he announced.

Given that there have been no statements from the Government accompanying the summer economic forecast, the league tables from the Secretary of State for Health and the Green Paper on the future of the Post Office, can the Leader of the House confirm that there will be a day's debate in Government time, before the recess, on economic affairs, the national health service and the Post Office respectively?

I am sure that no hon. Member has overlooked the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has not yet been able to tell us the date of the summer recess. Can he at least tell us when he will be able to tell us the date? Perhaps we shall be more fortunate next Thursday. For the avoidance of doubt, let me repeat that the request to know the date is not a request for an early departure.

Mr. Newton: Were I to accede to all the requests contained in the hon. Gentleman's first question, the date for the recess would clearly be some time in September. I hope to do rather better than that. My ambition—I would put it no more strongly than that—is to give the House some indication when we are clearer about the progress of business, this time next week.

Similarly, I hope at that time to give the hon. Gentleman a clear indication of the date for the economic debate in which he is particularly interested, and which we certainly expect to have before the recess. I cannot be quite so forthcoming about the national health service and the figures published yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, or, indeed, about the Post Office; but I should point out that a full statement on the Post Office was made some time ago, well before today's Green Paper was published.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the speech made in Bonn yesterday by our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Will he join me in welcoming that speech? Does he agree that the ambiguity about the Government's attitude towards the single currency satisfies neither the audience at home nor the audience abroad? Is it not time that we had a debate to settle our attitude to the single currency?

Mr. Newton: I always welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's speeches. Only recently, we had a substantial opportunity to debate European matters.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Returning to the question of the non-statement on the Government's proposals for the Post Office, is it not ridiculous that we had a statement when there was some press speculation earlier, but we do not have a statement when the Green Paper is published?

There will be a strong sense of disappointment and frustration on both sides of the House that we have not had a statement from the President of the Board of Trade on this important issue. Can we have a debate, are there circumstances in which we might have a paving Bill before next year's Bill? Would that paving Bill happen before the summer recess?

Mr. Newton: What has been published today is a Green Paper inviting comments—a consultation document. Clearly there would be no question of producing legislation before the consultation period was over. I understand why the hon. Gentleman asked the earlier part of his question. For whatever reason, a substantial statement was made indicating in general terms the basis on which the Government would be publishing a Green Paper, and I think that there would have been no justification for another statement today.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservative party of all parties should never rewrite or forget history, which is what we did in the mid-1970s when we abolished many ancient and historic counties? Will my right hon. Friend help to ameliorate some of the confusion that has arisen from the local government boundary review, in which the laudable objective of moving to one-tier authorities has been confused with the Secretary of State's right to cover the map of England in counties, and this time his opportunity to restore all those ancient counties to our land?

Mr. Newton: That seems to be an echo of a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and

Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) during Prime Minister's questions. I am sure that that earlier question, together with my hon. Friend's question, will have been heard, noted and inwardly digested by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): If we cannot have the date of the recess, can we have the date of the reshuffle? Can we have a considered response from the Government next week to the motion moved and carried in this House by the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir. J. Hannam) in relation to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? Are not the Government acting contemptuously of that motion?

Mr. Newton: Of course I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's latter point. There have been many comments by myself and others, most notably by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, on the Government's response to the various points that have been made about that and our intention, which is being pursued now, to develop a range of practicable and workable proposals to advance further the cause of disabled people.

I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that, were there to be a reshuffle, it is unlikely that he would be involved.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my right hon. Friend promise an urgent debate next week on industrial relations as it would provide an opportunity for hon. Members on both sides of the House to condemn the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, first, for causing a massive strike on the railway system, secondly for making a pay demand four times the rate of inflation, thirdly for costing the railways £10 million for the strike and fourthly for causing massive disruption and a loss of jobs to many people in the south-east, including my constituency of Dartford?

Mr. Newton: Were I not conscious of the House's desire for a date for the recess, I should be much tempted by my hon. Friend's suggestion. He admirably, and much more briefly than he could have in a speech in a debate, made a number of telling points.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House read your clear ruling two weeks ago, Madam Speaker, on the propriety of Ministers at the Dispatch Box asking questions of Opposition Members at the Dispatch Box? Has the right hon. Gentleman discussed the matter with the Prime Minister, who, in reply to Question 1 today, did precisely that? Will the Leader of the House make a statement on what Ministers' practice will be in the future? Will your ruling be upheld?

Mr. Newton: The question of your ruling is a matter for you, Madam Speaker, as I imagine you would agree. I read and, indeed, heard what you said some time ago—as, no doubt, did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I heard nothing this afternoon that was incompatible with that.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate next week on the decision in the Manchester High Court to make two lesbian women legal parents of a child, bearing in mind the damage to the child concerned and to society, which is based on proper family life, where children are entitled to a parent of both sexes and where lesbians do not conceive children in the circumstance that applied in this case?

Mr. Newton: I well understand why my hon. Friend has raised the point, but I hope that he will understand that I am reluctant to comment from the Dispatch Box on a court judgment that I have not had an opportunity to study. The case is sensitive and involves a number of people, including the child.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Will the Leader of the House assure us that a statement will be made before the summer recess on the outcome of the present secret talks on the future of Northern Ireland between Her Majesty's Government and the Dublin Government?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland continues to pursue, in an appropriate way, means of carrying forward the process of seeking to bring peace to Northern Ireland. He always makes a statement to the House when he thinks it appropriate to do so.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): As the sixth British soldier has been killed in Bosnia this week, and as *The Times* reports that the ceasefire in central Bosnia has broken down, will my right hon. Friend allow another debate on the matter before the House rises, so that hon. Members may have an opportunity to express their opinion on whether they wish this country to be sucked further into a Balkan civil war?

Mr. Newton: I regret that I cannot promise such a debate if I am to fulfil the hopes about the recess that are being pressed on me from various quarters. My hon. Friend has made a serious point, and I regard it as my duty to ensure that the implicit thrust of his question is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Leader of the House consider the questions that I have tabled to the Department of Transport about road safety? Will he find time next week for the House to debate the fact that one in three coaches and large vehicles that were stopped were found to have defective brakes, and many of them had defective steering? At a time when a sad inquest is taking place, it will concern every parent in this country that we are not debating such road transport matters.

Mr. Newton: I have not had an opportunity to study the hon. Lady's questions, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will consider with great care the questions and the issues that she raised.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): In view of questions already asked, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that he and his colleagues will resist any attempts to revert to forms of local government that, more than 20 years ago, were already declared out of date by a royal commission and by other inquiries, including our own in the party, and that instead, his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will continue to move forward to secure a form of local government that will meet the needs of our fellow citizens as we go into the 21st century?

Mr. Newton: I assure my right hon. Friend that my other right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will seek to move in a way that meets those

[Mr. Newton]

general requirements. It has to be said, I fear, that not everyone is agreed on what the requirements mean when they are translated into actual proposals.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Following on from that, if we had such a statement or debate, would it not make sense for the Government to drop this whole review of local government and get on to the problems that really affect people in the shires, the towns and the cities—to start building houses, to repair the schools and to rebuild the welfare state, instead of pottering about with boundaries? In 1974 it was a mess, and the Government did the same with the hospitals. The present review will create the same sort of havoc, and it will cost more than £1 billion. Use the money to help the people instead of shifting the boundaries.

Madam Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman asking for a statement on those matters next week, or is he merely making a statement himself?

Mr. Newton: If I may take it as a request for a statement next week, Madam Speaker, my answer is that I cannot promise that; I simply make the observation that I can think of a number of places—although I am not sure that I would wish to have their names dragged from me at the Dispatch Box—where reform in local authority structures might improve the application of policies in exactly the areas that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his inability to give the date of the recess today significantly underlines the need for reform of our parliamentary hours? Will he say how his negotiations on that subject are going? Is he aware that most continental Parliaments have already adjourned, or will do so over the coming week? I am not making a personal plea, because my children are grown up, but this is a fairly young Parliament, and many Members have young children. It is grossly unfair to them to have to sit on late into July.

Mr. Newton: I do not think that negotiations about hours can necessarily remove all the difficulties and uncertainties at certain times of the parliamentary year, but the answer to my hon. Friend's underlying question is that my talks with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) have proved constructive and are being carried forward, but of course there are several difficult issues to be teased out.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Leader of the House will have seen the written answer last Monday to my question about minerals planning guidance. There was a promise that the new guidance note will be published before the recess. Will the Minister make certain that there will be the opportunity to debate it, if not before the recess then as soon as we reassemble? The debate on the Coal Industry Bill showed that there is considerable interest in opencasting on both sides of the House.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I might simply bear that request in mind, without commitment for either side of the recess, and certainly without commitment before the recess.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Judging by today's questions from the Opposition, they are clearly unclear about our position on the single currency. In a spirit of helpfulness, I wonder whether we might have a debate on that matter, so that we can express our own clarity to clear up their unclarity.

Mr. Newton: I take it that that is the same spirit of helpfulness as that displayed by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), and I think that I shall rest on the answer that I gave him.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House give a guarantee that there will be a full and proper debate in the House if the Secretary of State for Social Security decides to introduce the so-called habitual residency test in connection with social security benefits?

Mr. Newton: The Secretary of State will be here on Monday not only for a debate but to answer questions, and that might provide the hon. Gentleman with an opportunity.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Will my right hon. Friend consider an urgent debate on employment issues, not only in the light of the good employment news from the city of Chester, where unemployment fell last year by 6 per cent., and has fallen by 35 per cent. since six years ago, but to tease out the views of the Opposition, who advocate full employment, in stark contrast to policies that the OECD has defined as likely to increase unemployment? May we have an urgent debate on that issue? The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East did not ask for a debate, but I would certainly welcome one.

Mr. Newton: So, I think, would many people, because I am glad to say that the fall in unemployment is not confined to the city of Chester. As it happens, although the Opposition spokesman did not ask specifically for a debate on employment and unemployment, those subjects would certainly be embraced in the debate on economic issues that he requested, and that I have promised. I hope that my hon. Friend will make those points during that debate.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In support of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) who asked for a debate on road transport, may I ask the Leader of the House whether he has observed the questions that have been tabled about the new danger posed by bull bars—a new fashion which people are fixing on the front of their Land Rover cars?

Has the right hon. Gentleman noticed that the Department of Transport has said that, if a child is hit at 20 mph by a Land Rover without a bull bar, the child will probably just be injured, but that, if a child is hit at 10 mph by a Land Rover with a bull bar, the accident will almost certainly be fatal? May we not have a debate so that we can banish this new and terrible safety hazard, which is only a fashion accessory and serves virtually no real purpose?

Mr. Newton: That is another point at which, I am sure, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will wish to look with care.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the draft declaration for the G7 summit in Naples yet again calls on the United Nations conference on population and development, which will take place in Cairo this September, to come up with a solution to the world's population problem? Is he aware that the conference will have 18,000 delegates, which

makes it every bit as big as the Rio summit two years ago, on which my right hon. Friend allowed not one but two debates in the House? Will he consider even a short debate before the House rises for the summer?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has consistently taken a serious and proper interest in these matters, and the conference he describes is obviously a substantial event. I cannot promise a debate before the recess, but in the serious spirit in which the point has been raised, I tell my hon. Friend that I shall look carefully to see whether there is any possibility of a debate at some appropriate time.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 912?

[*That this House welcomes the publication of the consultation paper Late Payment of Commercial Debt, as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement; notes the negative impact which late payment of commercial debt has on the job creation potential of, in particular, smaller businesses; recognises the importance of the small business sector in generating growth in the United Kingdom economy; and believes that the only effective solution to the problem of late payment of business debts is the implementation of a statutory right to interest on overdue commercial debts.*]

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, despite repeated rhetoric from Ministers, no action has been taken on the early-day motion or on the issue of late payments by big industries to small businesses, which causes problems not only for my constituents, but for people throughout the country.

Given that more than 300 hon. Members from both sides of the House have signed the early-day motion, which calls for statutory rights on interest payments, will the Leader of the House ask a Treasury Minister to come to the House to make a statement on why the Government continually refuse to support small businesses on this issue?

Mr. Newton: I cannot accept that the Government have persistently refused to support small business on the issue. On the contrary, it is an area in which the Government have consistently sought to help, not least by improving the performance of public authorities in dealing with their bills from small businesses. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the difficulties of the issue, of the considerable discussion of it in the recent White Paper on competitiveness and of what it said about how the Government intend to proceed.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): In view of the recent good news about the significant fall in serious crime in many areas, including my constituency, will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on crime? The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) might well welcome an opportunity to return to the House where he would, no doubt, like to welcome the news of falling crime.

Such a debate might also give him an opportunity to explain what he means by being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, as his deputy, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), has made it clear this week that the policy does not include sending serious criminals to prison. Would not the hon. Member for Sedgefield welcome the opportunity to come to the House to rebut the growing suspicion that his policy is a lot of meaningless and misleading waffle?

Mr. Newton: I think that a number of people would welcome some sight in the House of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and they would certainly welcome some explanation that went beyond, or beneath, the generalisations that he utters everywhere else about precisely what his policies are. Unhappily, I cannot promise a debate, not least because, in the wake of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, we seem to have had quite enough time to debate these matters in recent months.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Leader of the House pay some attention to the report issued today in Nottinghamshire about the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Leanne White? Will the right hon. Gentleman also look at the growth in pressure on social workers who are dealing with child protection matters, with the intention of making a statement to the House, and perhaps providing time for a debate on the growth in the number and the severity of demands in child care cases and the growing gap between those demands and resources available to deal with them?

Mr. Newton: From my experience as child care Minister on two occasions, I know of the pressures and problems which can affect workers in that field, so I certainly would not dismiss in any way the hon. Gentleman's question. While I cannot promise a debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who, of course, has responsibility for those matters, will be here next Tuesday.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to consider early-day motion 1363?

[*That this House notes that Railtrack in making an offer of 5.7 per cent., to restore the relativities of signalling staff grades' pay at its meeting with RMT on 7th June, effectively accepted the Union's argument that before any future discussions on productivity, it was necessary to compensate the signalling staff for their past productivity; also notes that it is clear that it is only because of outside interference from Government sources that this offer was withdrawn and, whilst insufficient to meet the signalling staff's honest aspirations, the 5 per cent. offer did lay the basis for negotiation, and therefore, the full responsibility for the current disruption of rail services must lie with the Government; therefore believes that the only proper solution to this dispute, is for the Government to stop their interference, and for Railtrack to reopen discussion on the basis of their original position that past productivity gains by signalling staff deserve compensation; and affirms its support for striking RMT members in their attempt to attain fair and honest treatment.*]

More than 51 Labour Members support the strike action of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, which has caused such disruption to commuters in my constituency. In the light of that, has my right hon. Friend received a request from those on the Opposition Front Bench for a Supply day debate on that strike? If not, is that because they are trying to protect the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who will not come out and say what he thinks about the strike? If they are not prepared to

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

have a debate on the matter, may we have one, so that Conservative Members can state our strong opposition to this greedy strike?

Mr. Newton: That is another request from my hon. Friend, to which I would very much wish to accede if I felt that it were practicable to make such time available. The one thing on which we can all agree is that there is not the slightest chance of the Opposition seeking a Supply day on the matter, since it would expose their division and the extent to which implicitly—and, in some cases, explicitly—they support that irresponsible strike.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Reference has already been made to some decisions of 20 years ago. Will the Leader of the House give a commitment that, when the issue of Northern Ireland and the way in which it is governed comes up again, we shall have more than an hour and a half for debate, bearing in mind the exchanges in the House on Tuesday night? As the epitome of modern democracy, we would like to think that Westminster sets a standard.

May I also add that next week is Alzheimer's awareness week? I trust that there shall be an opportunity for the House to recognise it.

Mr. Newton: I am acutely conscious of the problems caused by Alzheimer's disease, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and I am glad that he has managed to mention those problems in the House in such a way. However, he will appreciate that I cannot promise a debate.

On the point about Northern Ireland, I am aware of the concerns which were expressed in the House earlier in the week, although they were against the background of a week in which probably about half the time had been spent debating Northern Ireland matters. Nevertheless, I do not dismiss that concern, and I shall, of course, reflect on the points which have been raised.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I would like to tell my right hon. Friend how much I welcome the fact that we shall be debating the Police and Magistrates' Court Bill on Tuesday, because it will provide an opportunity for the hon. Member for Sedgefield to come to the House of Commons. We have not seen him or heard from him for weeks, and the debate will give him an opportunity to spell out where he stands on a number of key law and order issues. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that his personal statement says practically nothing about law and order matters? He is full of pious platitudes, but they contain precious few policies.

Mr. Newton: With his characteristically vigorous language, my hon. Friend makes a point that I made slightly more gently a few moments ago. I certainly hope that his plea will fall on listening ears.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): At 2.30 today, a report was published by Sir John May relating to the bombings in Guildford in 1974, which affects the position of the Guildford Four. Will there be a chance to discuss that report in the House? There is considerable interest in the case nationally at the moment, as there is a major film called "In the Name of the Father", which deals with those events and which a number of people believe contains various inaccuracies.

Mr. Newton: I cannot make an immediate promise of an opportunity to discuss that issue, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice made a number of recommendations in that area and, no doubt, at some appropriate time, there may be such an opportunity.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Would the Leader of the House arrange a debate next week on choice and diversity in education, in which we may warmly welcome this week's announcement that there will be more grammar-school places in the country? We may also ask why the Labour party, in the House and in local authorities, seems so vindictively to oppose grant-maintained schools, when the hon. Member for Sedgefield and the shadow Chief Secretary seem personally to endorse them for their own children?

Mr. Newton: The straightforward answer is that I cannot begin to explain that. Unhappily, I cannot see that his presumed appearance on the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill will provide the hon. Member for Sedgefield with an opportunity to explain on that occasion, but we can keep our fingers crossed that some such opportunity might arise.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the likely escalation of the signalmen's dispute, is the Leader of the House aware that we would welcome a statement from the Government next week? We would expect, and certainly the public would expect, a positive contribution from the Government to try to resolve the dispute, instead of their mischief-making and union-bashing.

As for the accusation of being greedy, does that not come ill from those on the Tory Benches who have more than one income? How would they like to compare their total income with that of the signalmen, who are undoubtedly on a low wage and believe that their claim is perfectly justified? I believe that their claim is justified, and that the Government should help to resolve the dispute.

Mr. Newton: I do not regard the phrase "union-bashing" as a reasonable description of the rejection of a position in which signalmen are demanding an 11 per cent. pay rise with no productivity or restructuring. That is simply not responsible under present circumstances.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Can my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on the recently published national health service performance comparison tables? The tables are excellent, and will enable standards in all hospitals to be raised to those of the best hospitals. It would give me an opportunity to debate the capitation funding of hospitals in Essex which fall somewhat short of the capitation funding of hospitals in London.

Mr. Newton: As a fellow Essex Member, I obviously find some difficulty in commenting on that, except to say that, over the years, I have also played my part in pressing things in the right direction. Of course, over the years, significant progress has been made in adjusting the balance in ways that are helpful to areas of rising population. As my hon. Friend will know, that process is continuing.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Can the Leader of the House find time next week for a statement on the Post Office, especially as the Green Paper has been dished out to journalists over the road before it is available in the Vote Office for hon. Members? As a fierce opponent of Post

Office privatisation, may I nevertheless applaud the lemming-like determination of the President of the Board of Trade to introduce legislation that will almost certainly be opposed and defeated in the House, not least by his Back Benchers—especially rural Members who know that it would be a disaster to sell off the Post Office—and it would be electoral suicide for the Conservatives as well?

Mr. Newton: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has yet had the chance to study the Green Paper—

Mr. Hain: It is not in the Vote Office.

Mr. Newton: —but he might be wise to do that before making comments of the sort that he has made. I have already said something about the question of a statement, and I will not add to that. I will certainly inquire into the position that he describes about copies in the Vote Office.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate next week on human rights? Last week, I raised the issue of the 625 Kuwaiti detainees still held in Iraq. This week, three Kuwaiti Members of Parliament have been in London visiting colleagues on both sides of the House. They are concerned that oil embargoes on Iraq could be lifted before the detainees are released. Bearing in mind that this country has ancient and loyal ties with Kuwait, would it not be in order for us to discuss that?

Mr. Newton: I pay a tribute to my hon. Friend's persistent advocacy of that cause. If I may, I shall bring her representations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Points of Order

4.3 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have always thought that the point of the business statement was to ask the Leader of the House to arrange debates or statements. Clearly, you have been concerned that Ministers should reply relating to their responsibilities. A few moments ago, I asked the Leader of the House a brief and direct question: whether he would arrange for a debate if the Secretary of State for Social Security chose to introduce certain regulations.

The Leader of the House referred me to the Secretary of State for Social Security on Monday. As the Secretary of State has no responsibility for arranging debates, and the Leader of the House has that responsibility, I wonder whether, on reflection, the Leader of the House might now choose to answer my question, rather than referring me to somebody who has no responsibility in that area.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the Leader of the House forgot to use the word "no" at the beginning of his answer.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): For your assistance, Madam Speaker, and following your characteristic generosity, I am not quite sure what I forgot, but I did think that the hon. Gentleman was basically making a point about whether he thought that such regulations ought to be introduced. That matter would be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. Were those regulations to be introduced, and were they to be affirmative regulations, obviously I would wish to arrange for a debate.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you consider preparing and giving general guidance to the House on when you expect ministerial statements to be made? As you will appreciate, there have been a number of inquiries this afternoon about whether statements will be made on matters of policy which have been announced outside the House. There is, I think, some confusion generally in the House about when we should expect ministerial statements.

I particularly take the example of the postal services, where, as has been pointed out, we had a statement in response to a newspaper leak. However, when the Green Paper was prepared, it was issued to journalists without an opportunity for the House to examine it. As you will understand, Back-Bench Members from both sides of the House—particularly from rural areas, although not exclusively so—think that this is a matter of great concern, not just for the reputation of Parliament but to our constituents. Can you give guidance to those on the Treasury Bench, as well as to Back Benchers, as to when you expect ministerial statements to be made?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman understands, as does the House, that a Green Paper is a consultative document and therefore the beginning of the legislative procedure and not the end.

I certainly could not take on the responsibility of anticipating when the Government were about to make a statement. The Government inform me when they wish to make a statement. The House is informed during the lunch period, so that all Members are fully aware an hour or two before a statement is to be made.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

EDUCATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Education (Inter-authority Recoupment) Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland Act (Extension)

4.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 24th May, be approved.

The draft Order renews the temporary provisions in the Northern Ireland Act 1974, under which the government is carried out by direct rule for a further 12 months. Believing strongly, as I do, in the virtues of local democratic responsibility I regret intensely that it should be necessary to renew it yet again. I know that, however, to be the case, and I accordingly shall follow precedent by referring the House to some aspects of the Government's stewardship in Northern Ireland during the past year. My speech must be appropriately brief.

Security matters remain in the forefront of our minds, particularly after the recent disgusting atrocity in Loughinisland. But the House has taken a recent opportunity, in our debate on the emergency powers provisions, to discuss this topic. There has been progress by the security forces in many areas, but terrorist crimes, both loyalist and republican, continue to deny the people of Northern Ireland what they most desire—the enjoyment of their right to live their lives in peace.

The House will recall all too vividly some of the revolting things the people of Northern Ireland have been forced to suffer during the past year. For example, in the latter part of 1993, in the space of seven days in October, 23 people lost their lives. None of us will forget the bombing on the Shankill road, in which 10 people were killed, or the equally ruthless massacre of seven people at Greysteel.

No matter how vainly repetitious it may seem, it is necessary for the House once more to condemn, without qualification, all those and the other attacks which have taken place. There is no acceptable level of violence, and we must never give the impression that there is. I admire immensely the steadfastness and resolution of Northern Ireland's people. I also wish to pay a special tribute to the disciplined courage and professionalism of the security forces who protect the people. Last year, 14 police officers and soldiers were killed while carrying out their role of protecting the community. Five have been killed this year.

Nor do we forget the arduous work of the prison service. What we are sometimes in danger of forgetting is the successes continually achieved by the security forces in the fight against terrorism. In 1993, more than 350 people were charged with terrorist-related offences, including more than 50 with murder and attempted murder. So far this year, 233 people have been charged with terrorist offences. Only this week, seven people have been charged, including two with murder.

The Chief Constable estimates that four out of five attempted attacks are thwarted. Much of the work of the security forces, by its nature, can receive little publicity, but the Royal Ulster Constabulary never gives up. We give it the fullest practical support and backing, and I salute its work, and the work of those who support it, today.

Today, we will also have in mind those who so tragically died in the helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre on 2 June. The deaths of so many first class police officers, Army officers, civil servants and air crew constituted a grievous loss. Our sympathy for those bereaved unites us all. I have received many touching letters. But the work of those fine people continues.

From the particular issue of security, I turn now to our co-ordinated approach to the political, economic and social problems that confront the people of Northern Ireland. Adverse economic and social conditions—which affect both sides of the community—can be used to suggest an ostensible, although always a spurious, pretext for terrorism. There is therefore a particular need for the promotion of a buoyant economy, increased job opportunities, and greater prosperity, and a need for all in the community of Northern Ireland to have equal opportunity to enjoy those benefits.

I shall refer to our progress in those matters in a moment, but first we must remember that terrorism abhors harmony and thrives on discord. There is therefore a particular need for the promotion of a political settlement —one that is broad in character and will attract widespread support, by reason of its characteristics, right across the community of Northern Ireland. It is to this area of patient and often frustrating endeavour in the past year that I now turn.

It remains the Government's firm belief that any settlement likely to achieve such acceptance and support must address all the main relationships: those within Northern Ireland; those within the island of Ireland; and those between the two Governments in Dublin and London. It was for that reason that, with the other participants, we agreed in 1991 that the political talks should be structured in three strands, reflecting those sets of relationships. Nothing would be finally agreed in any strand until everything was agreed in the talks as a whole.

Some have claimed, and continue to claim, that seeking an overall settlement in this way is far too ambitious, and that the process should move forward one step at a time. It is quite clear to us, however, that, because of the differing ideals and differing ultimate objectives of those who have participated in the talks, agreement on one set of relationships is only likely to be reached if the context for it is provided by agreement on the three sets of relationships as a whole. We believe that to be a political reality which cannot be wished away, and one which all of us involved in the process must recognise and work with.

Since September 1993, the Government have been conducting bilateral discussions with three of the four main constitutional parties. We should like to see all four involved. Our purpose has been to explore the basis upon which we might all together sit down again for further dialogue. The present aim is to establish areas of common agreement; explore areas of continued apprehension or disagreement and to try to identify the degree of flexibility that may be needed on all sides to resolve those difficulties.

We have been discussing the Government's ideas for giving direction and renewed impetus to the talks process. For our part, it is my hon. Friend the Minister of State who has been principally engaged, but the Prime Minister and I have also participated. We are each of us grateful for the sincere participation of our colleagues in this process.

On the basis of the talks that occurred in 1992, and those that are going on now, there is a good measure of contingent agreement on strand 1 on the nature of new democratic institutions for Northern Ireland.

Strand 1 is especially significant today, because, if, as I believe is achievable, final agreement is reached among the main parties on the exercise of local democratic responsibilities, then, in the context of an overall settlement, the Government would implement the new arrangements agreed, and today's order would need no successor. But to be lasting, any such local democratic institutions must be widely acceptable throughout the community of Northern Ireland and must therefore give a genuine and fair share of democratic responsibilities to both sides of the community.

It is clear, however, that what common ground exists among the parties on strand 1 is contingent on a satisfactory outcome to the process as a whole, including strands 2 and 3. To help progress to be made in those two strands, in both of which all the main parties accepted that the two Governments should each be involved, we are currently working with the Irish Government on a framework document. As always, that has given rise to apprehensions about what may be afoot.

First, therefore, I repeat without equivocation that the future of Northern Ireland lies in the hands of its own people. There will be no change in its constitutional status as an integral part of the United Kingdom save in accordance with the democratic wishes of its people, and no political settlement without the participation of the main political parties in arriving at it, and the widespread acceptance of the people of Northern Ireland to the outcome.

Secondly, let me address fears about what is spoken of as "joint authority". I think that that means that the British and Irish Governments would jointly run the affairs of Northern Ireland over the heads of the people. It is feared that the two Governments seek or plan to impose that. There is no truth in that at all. To impose such a structure against the will of the people of Northern Ireland would be incompatible with the principle of consent. For that reason, it would, in my belief, be unacceptable to this House. Additionally, however, it is not sought by the Irish Government, let alone our own. As Mr. Spring said on 25 April,

"Joint authority is not being considered".

It is quite a different matter to examine, as the four parties and the Governments all did in 1992, ways in which, without impinging in any manner on sovereignty, some north-south body could enable common cause to be made in areas of common interest. That would be to the general good of both parts of the island of Ireland.

However, acceptability remains the key test. I believe that such a body would be acceptable, not only in Northern Ireland but in the Republic as well, only if it operated in areas clearly delegated to it by the appropriate legislature in each jurisdiction. For the same reason, it would have to be accountable to democratic institutions in Belfast and Dublin, with decisions taken on the basis of agreement between the representatives of both parts of the island.

Provided, of course, that there is widespread agreement in Northern Ireland, there is no reason why a body constructed in that way should not assume a variety of delegated functions and responsibilities, including executive functions. That does not confer joint authority on the Dublin Government over Northern Ireland or anything like

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

it, any more than Stormont conferred such authority when, in 1952, it set up the Foyle Fisheries Commission to regulate the river that is bisected by the border. All that falls squarely within the ambit of strand 2.

Nor is there any question of us working on a deal to be imposed on the political parties or Northern Ireland people. That would be incompatible with the foundation principle of consent. Our aim is to help the process forward through discussion and agreement with the parties and, ultimately, the people. As the Taoiseach clearly put it on 24 May:

"We recognise that the only agreement which will last is one that the Unionist and Loyalist community have freely participated in making".

It is, of course, possible to work upon some people's natural fears by making unfounded assertions about the discussions known to be taking place between our own and the Irish Government. It is not only possible; it is easy. To some, it seems irresistibly tempting. But it is also irresponsible. What we are about is endeavouring to achieve a shared understanding between us of the elements of a political settlement which, in our view, is most likely to command widespread support across the community in Northern Ireland.

We wish to do that, not to give Dublin a role in running the internal affairs of the north but to help all the participants reach an overall agreement in the knowledge of the two Governments' views, where those may be relevant and only where those may be relevant.

I would expect any outcome to include the following elements: a shared and mutually acceptable understanding of those important constitutional matters known to be in issue; the establishment of locally accountable democratic institutions in Northern Ireland which provide an appropriate and worthy role for representatives of both main parts of the community; new arrangements for contact, co-operation and working together within the island of Ireland; and new arrangements between the two Governments. I believe that, with reality and good will, all those should be attainable.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Secretary of State agree that those objectives are desirable, and would be so to any fair-minded person in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom or the Republic? Does he further agree that, if we want the support of the international community in the fight against terrorism—and I believe that we have that support—it is important for the international community to understand the willingness of the British Government and the Irish Government to work together jointly, and to recognise that there are certain responsibilities in the island of Ireland on which, from a purely common-sense point of view, it is right and proper that Northern Ireland and the Republic should be working together? If the international community understands what is desired by both Governments, all the more reason for us to have their continued support.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree that there is support in the international community for the fight against terrorism, and I think that much heart has been taken in the international community by reason of the evidence afforded by the joint declaration that the two Governments stand side by side on such important matters. I think that there is a genuine understanding that, in aspects where there is common interest, it makes good sense to make common cause. It is also widely understood that it would not be acceptable for that process to impinge on sovereignty. That is a matter which must be determined by the consent of the people involved.

In the broader field, practical co-operation on a range of economic and social issues has continued in the past year. The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda Siochana work closely together, facing as they do a common terrorist threat. That has, unquestionably, saved lives on both sides of the border.

In the past year, considerable progress has been made towards tackling deficiencies in the extradition arrangements between our two countries. The two Governments are resolute and stand shoulder to shoulder in their rejection of violence.

By far the most significant development in the past year has, of course, been the joint declaration. That represents a public commitment by the two Governments to a shared understanding of the political realities in Ireland today, and to a common approach to the problems of Northern Ireland, based on the principles of democracy and consent. It has the overwhelming endorsement of the people of Ireland, north and south, and the strong support of the British public.

The joint declaration has put the spotlight on the terrorists and their apologists. It must now be clear to everyone that there can be no excuse—no justification whatsoever—for political violence in this democracy. The joint declaration acknowledges and safeguards the interests of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, according parity of esteem to each. There is no compromise on any issue of principle that is essential to the position of either tradition.

I return to the performance of the economy in Northern Ireland in the past year. Once again, there is good news to report. The economy has come through the recession well, and is performing strongly in the recovery. A few statistics serve to illustrate the picture.

Manufacturing output continued the strong performance of the previous year, growing by 3.6 per cent. during 1993 compared with growth of 1.6 per cent. for the entire United Kingdom. In the year to May 1994, unemployment fell by 5.2 per cent. and, at 13.1 per cent., is the lowest for three years. Of course, those levels are still far too high, and we shall continue our efforts to reduce them further.

The Industrial Development Board had one of its most successful years in 1993-94, promoting a record 2,309 inward investment jobs. Since April, two further major projects have been announced—the offer by TransTec from Great Britain of 181 new jobs in Londonderry, and the proposal of Hualon from Taiwan to create 1,800 new jobs near Belfast, with another 500 or so jobs associated with the construction.

I can also report some impressive results from the small business sector, for which the Local Enterprise Development Unit is responsible. The year 1993-94 was a record year, with more than 1,300 new businesses established. The continuing success of Northern Ireland Electricity Plc, and news of another record-breaking year for tourism in Northern Ireland, add to the general atmosphere of optimism on the economy.

Finally, on social development, the "making Belfast work" initiative, which began in 1988 as a direct response on the part of the Government to the deep-rooted deprivation in parts of Belfast on both sides of the community, has continued to provide many employment

and training opportunities. Parts of Belfast and of the rest of the Province face high levels of long-term unemployment; 60 per cent. of those who are unemployed have been so for at least one year, compared with 35 per cent. in the rest of the United Kingdom. Such unemployment is a blight, affecting the hopes of the people on both sides of the community, and we are actively taking steps to deal with it wherever it occurs.

For all its initiatives, "making Belfast work" has, in this financial year alone, received a further £24.6 million. That represents an increase of £1 million on the allocation for 1993-94. On 26 April, I gave a commitment that the initiative would run for at least another three years.

I conclude by looking to the future. I have faith in a better future for Northern Ireland. I think that we now have an unparalleled opportunity for peace and stability. The joint declaration created a new context for political progress and has met with support across the community in Northern Ireland, and nationally and internationally. Sinn Fein now knows how it can enter the political process. It should renounce violence now and join in the political process. But whatever it decides, we shall carry on, with or without Sinn Fein.

We shall carry on working with the Irish Government for the shared understanding about which I have spoken, which is most likely to produce a settlement. We shall continue to talk to the main Northern Ireland constitutional parties, with a view to securing an agreed settlement. We shall maintain the political momentum. We shall, with the Irish Government, resolutely continue to fight terrorism.

This is a different picture from that of a year ago. We have further rational grounds for hope that, through consent and democracy, a settlement will be reached. Until that happens, however, Northern Ireland should remain under direct rule, so I commend the order to the House.

4.26 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I join the Secretary of State in extending our support to the security forces and to all who are engaged in impartially upholding the rule of law in Northern Ireland. They deserve our support; too often they deserve and receive our sympathy when they suffer casualties and bereavements.

Like the Secretary of State, I regret the fact that we are again debating an extension of direct rule in Northern Ireland. It is a palpable sign of failure on the part of politicians that we have been unable to address and, if not solve the problem, at least arrive at a settlement that would be acceptable to the peoples of Ireland, Northern Ireland and all these islands.

No party in this House or in Ireland views direct rule as a solution to the problem in Northern Ireland. The fact that we are again renewing the status quo merely serves to underline our collective failure in Britain and Ireland to find a constitutional settlement that has widespread support in both communities.

We regret the need to renew the Northern Ireland Act, but we must also object to the ridiculously short time that we have to debate it today. The lack of time granted by the Government for this debate represents their failure to acknowledge the gravity of the political situation in Northern Ireland. The recent spate of killings, and especially the atrocities at Loughinisland, highlight the urgent need to find a political settlement.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want correctly to describe why we have this amount of time. We had assumed that we would be given three hours—in other words, half a day—for the debate, but owing to a misunderstanding, and because the agenda was switched at least three times towards the end of last week, I was given to understand that the official Opposition wanted a vote on the second motion, which is why the debate was truncated. I am not accusing the Labour party; I am just explaining what happened. It is, as the hon. Gentleman says, regrettable.

Mr. McNamara: I am glad that our wish to have a vote on the second order, which we regard as most important, has been met. It was, however, foisted on the Opposition and on the House with no warning, and after the shadow Cabinet had discussed the business for the week. I need not pursue that matter further other than to say that as we have only a short time for the debate I shall seek to keep my remarks relatively brief so that all those hon. Members who wish to speak may do so.

The British and the Irish Governments must continue to work together to agree a joint framework document to put to the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. Under article 2 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the two Governments have pledged to make determined efforts to resolve any differences. It is vital that both Governments remain united in pursuit of a settlement which grants parity of esteem to the aspirations and beliefs of both communities in Northern Ireland.

I hope that the Minister of State, when he replies to the debate, will be able to give the House the timetable for the joint framework document and say whether the date of the proposed Prime Ministerial summit has been put back to the end of July or is still on course for about the third week of July. Will he also say whether the nub of the disagreement between the two Governments is the nature and powers of cross-border institutions and whether any framework document which is agreed will be published so that the people of Britain and Ireland can also judge the proposals? I realise, of course, that they will have to go to the parties first, but it should be possible for the people most concerned, the people in Northern Ireland, to see what the two Governments are discussing.

The Labour party's policy is to support the concept of a united Ireland by consent. That policy has been endorsed by successive party conferences since 1981. However, the Labour party would not seek to impose that policy preference on the peoples of Ireland. The Labour party would and should accept any agreement which has the support of the people of Ireland, north and south.

Therefore, we welcomed the British Government's commitment in the joint declaration to give legislative effect to any measure of agreement on the future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland themselves freely determine without external impediment.

We hope that the inter-party talks can be resumed at the earliest possible date, based upon the principles contained in the joint declaration. We particularly welcome the Secretary of State's statement, in relation to Sinn Fein's questions, that the only condition to be met in order to arrive at any discussion of the future of Ireland and Northern Ireland is a permanent cessation of violence. That is of the utmost importance.

I welcome also the fact that the Secretary of State said today that the talks should maintain the three-strand

[Mr. McNamara]

structure agreed in 1991 covering the relationships between the communities within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between Britain and Ireland. The principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed must be maintained. Agreement must be reached on each of the strands before any strand is implemented.

In particular, strand 1, dealing with relations within Northern Ireland, cannot be decoupled from strands 2 and 3. The Secretary of State made that clear today. Each strand is interlocked and interrelated. The establishment of a Northern Ireland Assembly without agreed cross-border institutions would not be a viable option.

We are in favour of the establishment of a devolved power-sharing Assembly for Northern Ireland in the context of the wider constitutional settlement. It would ensure greater direct accountability for the peoples of Northern Ireland and a more democratic decision-making process. A power-sharing Assembly should help to improve relations between the communities as parties would be encouraged to work together co-operatively to improve the conditions of all Northern Ireland citizens.

An Assembly with genuine power-sharing mechanisms can guarantee that the voice of the minority community will be heard. As the Secretary of State has asserted in the past, there can be no return to simple majoritarian rule. That excludes both the Stormont-type regime and a system which is based on pure proportionality. A Northern Ireland Assembly cannot be successfully established in isolation. It must be part of a settlement that grants parity of esteem to the nationalist community and includes an institutionalised Irish dimension.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I do not know whether I caught the hon. Gentleman's words right, but did he say that there can be no majority rule and no proportional majority rule?

Mr. McNamara: The point that I am making is that there has to be power sharing; that majority rule such as there was in the old Stormont is not acceptable. I do not think that anyone expects to see that return. A system based on pure proportionality, which would not mean equality between the communities, would also not be acceptable.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: No, I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman. [Hon. Members: "Why not?"] Because I saw the way that he behaved the other night.

There can be no purely internal settlement because the Northern Ireland conflict is not primarily internal to Northern Ireland—it has an external dimension. Presently, a majority in Northern Ireland define themselves as British citizens and want to remain within the United Kingdom, while a large and growing minority see themselves as Irish and want to be constitutionally and institutionally linked to the Republic of Ireland.

Almost 40 per cent. of the Northern Ireland electorate voted for nationalist parties in the European election. If we are to have peace in these islands, the British and Irish dimensions of the conflict must be recognised. Northern Ireland is the site of two competing sovereignty claims. Both Britain and Ireland have conflicting title deeds. Under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 as amended, the British Government claim unqualified sovereignty over Northern Ireland. On the basis of that claim, the Secretary of State is allegedly still pressing for amendment of article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement explicitly to define Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

Under articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, the Republic claims Northern Ireland as part of its natural territory. Those articles do not represent an aggressive territorial claim on another nation state because article 29 of the Irish constitution specifically commits the Irish state "to the principle of the pacific settlement of international disputes".

Articles 2 and 3 represent a symbolic expression of the legitimate aspirations of 40 per cent. of the Northern Ireland electorate, while section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 expresses the national allegiances of 60 per cent. of the electorate. The British and Irish territorial claims mirror and entrench the divided allegiances in Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: No, I will not give way. [Hon. Members: "Why not?"] Because other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate, for which only one and a half hours is allowed. If they are lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they will have an opportunity to make their observations on my remarks.

Articles 2 and 3 of the 1920 Act as amended are now on the negotiating table. That represents a major breakthrough in British-Irish relations, because both Governments appear to recognise the need for balanced constitutional settlement. Both territorial claims must be addressed if we are to seek to resolve the conflicting national aspirations of the peoples of Northern Ireland.

It must be recognised that amending articles 2 and 3 is a decision for the Irish people and is not within the gift of the Irish Government, and that a referendum on articles 2 and 3 is unlikely to be passed except as part of a wider settlement that the people of the Republic believe is acceptable to northern nationalists.

The right of the Unionist community to remain in the United Kingdom while they form the majority in Northern Ireland has been recognised by the British and Irish in the Anglo-Irish Agreement—a binding international treaty—and, recently, in the joint declaration. The Unionist population have a cast-iron guarantee that Northern Ireland will not be united with the rest of Ireland without the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland. In return for the security that that guarantee grants, the Unionist population, both Governments and the nationalist population of Northern Ireland are entitled to expect some flexibility from Unionist politicians, and recognition of the nationalist identity and the aspirations that they believe should be given institutional expression.

A no-surrender mentality can never bring reconciliation. We will see a resolution of the conflict only when all parties recognise that we are not playing a zero sum game. It is possible to compromise without losing one's cause or beliefs. All sides gain if there is a permanent cessation of violence and an accommodation of differences.

The Labour party believes that there must be some form of institutionalised Irish dimension in any political settlement. Formal and institutional recognition must be given to the sense of Irish identity held in the nationalist

community. Institutions must be established that allow authority, power and responsibility to be shared between the peoples of Northern Ireland in full co-operation with the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. There should be no transfer of sovereignty without the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland, but the British and Irish Governments must share responsibility for developing a constitutional framework for a political settlement in the absence of agreement in Northern Ireland.

The joint declaration by the British and Irish Governments contains principles that should form the basis of a just and durable settlement for the peoples of Northern Ireland. The Labour party would prefer the agreement to be made between the parties in Northern Ireland on a constitutional settlement that secures widespread support; but no party or organisation has the right to hinder political progress. As the Secretary of State said in his reply to the Sinn Fein questionnaire, no party has a veto.

If the constitutional parties are unable to resolve their differences, the two Governments have a duty to the citizens of these islands to address the underlying causes of the conflict and agree a settlement that grants both communities rights and aspirations, parity of esteem and practical expression. We believe that those should be the principles underlying the discussions that will take place between the parties, and the underlying and underpinning matters contained in the framework document that the two Governments will present.

Following the expressions of hope that we have heard from the Secretary of State, I myself hope that this may yet be the last time we have to ask the House—regretfully—to renew the legislation.

4.40 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I shall be brief. The main themes of the argument have been well rehearsed and do not require detailed re-presentation, and other hon. Members wish to speak.

There is no viable or responsible alternative to endorsing the extension order; to do otherwise would be to plunge the government of Northern Ireland into chaos. That is not to say that we warmly welcome and embrace the continuation of direct rule. There are many manifestations of its defects—of the democratic deficit—and we look to the creation of circumstances in which the order can be consigned to history. That is a major objective of Government policy.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is fully aware of the strength and depth of Conservative support for the policy that he is pursuing. That policy has three main pillars, all of which deserve the plaudits that they are receiving. The first is the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland is de facto and de jure part of the United Kingdom, because that is the democratically expressed wish of the majority, and will remain so as long as that is the case. On the other hand, we accept the entire legitimacy of nationalist politicians who seek a united Ireland. Let that debate be resolved through the democratic process.

The constitutional guarantee, endorsed by the Republic of Ireland, is therefore the first pillar of Government policy that deserves support. The second is the strong emphasis on seeking agreement on the structures of government in Northern Ireland, and related matters, through consent. There is no room for coercion. In the not very recent past, we had three-strand talks: there were three strands because there are three relevant sets of relations. We welcome the fact that the Government are seeking to recreate a climate in which meaningful talks can take place between the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland and we especially welcome the Minister of State's quoted statement that

> "Nothing will emerge as a result of the talks process that will fail the fundamental test of widespread agreement."

Consent is the only way forward. We interpret that as a statement in crude shorthand that both sides of the major political divide in Northern Ireland have the right to object to, or accept, whatever may emerge from the talks process.

Mr. Winnick: No one disputes the right of the majority in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) made that perfectly clear: in no way does he dispute the right of the majority not to be forced into a united Ireland.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that there can be no veto on other matters either when two Governments can reach agreement—as is quite likely, and as we hope that they will—on various questions, including joint bodies, and when sovereignty is not an issue? As with the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the two Governments should be in a position to decide on matters where there is no question of sovereignty being taken from the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hunter: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is directing that question to the right person; I think that it should probably be fielded by the Secretary of State or a Minister of State. As I see it, the principle is clear, having been agreed by the Governments of both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. There is no room for coercion on any matter: widespread agreement is the only way forward. It is perhaps simplistic to speak in terms of a veto, although I acknowledge that I did so briefly a moment ago. We must look for a consensus of constitutional, responsible feeling and thought, emerging from a meaningful negotiation. We are not predetermining anything: nothing is ruled in and nothing is ruled out, as the saying goes.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunter: I will, but I must then proceed with my speech.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Would the hon. Gentleman care to answer a simple question that many people in Northern Ireland are asking today? What consent was sought from the majority in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Mr. Hunter: I will not answer that question, because I regard it as irrelevant to the debate. The Anglo-Irish Agreement exists, and many of us—not least Lady Thatcher—are on record as expressing some misgivings about that. For many reasons, would that we were not starting where we are, but we cannot do other than seek a meaningful debate on the basis of our present position. I shall therefore deliberately turn my back on the hon. Gentleman's question.

I have spoken of two pillars of policy that I strongly applaud—the constitutional guarantee, and the search for a meaningful dialogue and settlement of the structures in Northern Ireland. The third pillar is the uncompromising and uncompromised pursuit of the fight against terrorism.

[Mr. Hunter]

That involves a constant process of revaluation: are we really sure that we are devoting enough resources to the task, and are they being used in the optimum manner? Are the structures of intelligence-gathering right, and are they properly co-ordinated?

Then there is the question of the involvement of the Republic. We seek ever greater commitment and co-operation, while acknowledging the real progress that has been made in recent years. Those are questions that must be asked, and the Government are asking them.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential for all parties in the House fully to support the fight against terrorism? Is it not very disappointing that Opposition Members—the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—have hosted a meeting with Sinn Fein members in the Houses of Parliament? That is the very body that promotes bloody terrorism. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must all work with one mind?

Mr. Hunter: I certainly agree with the last point. I repeat that I have no doubt whatever that all hon. Members are dedicated to the fight against terrorism. My quarrel with the Labour party is that its reasoning is wrong. I do not for a moment doubt its opposition to terrorism, but I believe that its assessment of how the fight should be conducted is inadequate.

I make one final point about dealing with terrorism. We have recently been presented with what I choose to call the Annesley-Trimble proposals, referring to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). Serious questions have been posed about the admissibility of hearsay and electronically gathered evidence, redefining the right to silence, re-examining the supergrass syndrome and considering greater protection for witnesses. Those are important points. I am not sure that the hon. Member for Upper Bann has necessarily got everything entirely right, but many Conservative Members listened carefully to what he said and look forward to the on-going debate under those headings.

As I have said, there is no alternative other than to endorse the extension order. I believe that the Government should receive, deservedly, applause for the overall strategy that they are pursuing in Northern Ireland matters.

4.50 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I know that some will take the view that Unionist representatives were wrong to decide to open up discussions after the general election in 1987 with the freshly re-elected Government to see if it would be possible to find an alternative to and replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 which, as has already been said, is now recognised as one of the great miscalculations in British history.

On balance, but only on balance, I think that we were right to try the path of discussion and negotiation, particularly since, as a pro-Union community—the greater proportion of people in Northern Ireland—we had solidly made manifest our opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

In the five years from 1987 to 1992, it looked for a while as though we were assured of a fair and honourable response, but by mid-1992 it was apparent that our willingness to talk had been construed in some quarters as weakness. The final disappointment came in November 1992 when the two Governments decided to terminate—that was the word—the three-strand talks. In the three weeks before Christmas 1992, agents established contact with terrorist leaders. That was common knowledge in the early part of last year and was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in the House on 13 July last year.

The three weeks before Christmas 1992 were an important reference point, proving conclusively that muscle men were to be placed on a par with democratically elected parties. The signal was clearly understood by the greater number of people in Northern Ireland and it became —and remains—a major obstacle to the launch of new high-level talks and it casts a shadow over the low-key discussions, patiently and ably steered and chaired since September last year by the Minister responsible for political development, the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I cannot help feeling that the Minister is not being helped by Dublin's insistence that new talks must be the same high profile, high wire act which was such a monumental failure before.

Irish Ministers also insist that the guidelines to which we all submitted and subscribed on 26 March 1991 be rigidly observed, particularly the three-strand structure. Some hon. Members have taken the same line. Very well. But that formula specified a sequence, commencing with strand 1, which dealt with an internal structure for the better governance of Northern Ireland. It was always agreed that such an internal structure would be broadly approved and banked—that was the word—before moving on to the strand 2 discussions, concerning relations between the new Stormont structure and an Irish Government.

Now, Dublin Ministers are ignoring the fact that they are breaching the agreed guidelines by ignoring the sequence pattern and by making unhelpful public pronouncements on all three strands at once. Worse still, they seem determined to devise an alternative framework that is presumably designed to be a different agenda from that which was approved and agreed in 1991 by all prospective participants.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I must quarrel with the point that the right hon. Gentleman has just made. In the last negotiations, which, as he said, centred on the strand 1 section, the right hon. Gentleman's colleague the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) presented a paper on the same type of north-south arrangements about which the right hon. Gentleman is now speaking. There was no arbitrary division between the discussions on strand 1 and the other elements of discussion, as was proved by the right hon. Gentleman's party in its presentation of that paper.

Mr. Molyneaux: I will be charitable to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), as his memory is at fault. He will recall that a team from his party —authorised by its leader, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume)—engaged with representatives of the other parties in the working party which drew up a model for a devolved internal government.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Not true.

Mr. Molyneaux: I shall go further in a minute.

The leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party entered certain reservations that he declined to remove until he could see the shape of the strand 2 agenda. Other party leaders will remember that we rescued the talks from a complete breakdown at the end of the strand 1 discussions. In the Queen Elizabeth II building across the road we suggested that we jump prematurely into strand 2 so that at least the hon. Member for Foyle—I do not know whether the other members of his party took the same view—could see the shape of the agenda. At the end of strand 2 discussions, in an effort to breathe life into the negotiations, papers were submitted on the last day of the session. That was a different operation.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way so that we can test both our memories. In effect, there was no such thing as an agreed paper by any section of those involved in the talks. A discussion paper was presented to the plenary session, but it was never adopted. It was noted, but it had no more status than that.

Mr. Molyneaux: The records will show that agreement was reached by representatives of the hon. Gentleman's party on the shape and structure of the new Stormont assembly. It was held up and we did not press it because the hon. Member for Foyle had entered reservations which he did not withdraw.

The new agenda—what the Irish Government seemed to be proposing—steered the discussions away from the priority of finding agreement on an internal arrangement for co-operation between legitimate constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and the administration of the affairs of the people of the Province towards an altogether different objective of joint sovereignty, within which framework the internal governance of Northern Ireland would be allocated a place, presumably given assurances of good behaviour on our part. As was made clear in the authentic Irish Government paper of 19 November 1993, the internal government structure could be demolished at any time by the said joint authority.

The way was paved for all this in the SDLP submission to what we might call, if the Secretary of State will forgive me, the Mayhew talks in 1992. That submission confirmed that equality or civil rights were not the main concern. In reference to the Unionist proposals, the SDLP said:

"While in general terms, such proposals might be both acceptable and sufficient in a society in which equality of treatment for minorities was the only issue, they are not sufficient in a society in which allegiance is a central problem."

It would appear that the central problem of allegiance can be resolved only by some form of joint authority. The House should be aware of the implications of this because the House will be involved. Joint authority must extend to a greater land mass than the six counties of Northern Ireland because there are many millions of Irish citizens living and working in England who, in various ways, owe allegiance to the Irish Republic.

It follows, in pure logic, that joint authority must have common application to the entire British Isles, so it seems that we are back to the Act of Union as a model of common citizenship and shared sovereignty. That will not only put a stopper on any form of devolution anywhere in the United Kingdom; it will remove at a stroke what is essentially a home rule structure in Dublin, retracing its steps to resume its honoured place in the British nation. However presented, packaged or devised, any form of joint authority must terminate in British Isles unity, because there is no halfway house.

I am indebted to the Cadogan Group of academics for the list of solid reasons why the Reynolds ambition of a joint authority would be unworkable. They state, first:

"It is impracticable. There is no modern precedent for it, and most schemes put forward for Northern Ireland look unworkably complex.

It is impermanent. Many proposals are either explicitly or implicitly put forward as transitional stages towards a greater degree of Irish unity.

It is unbalanced. Fundamental to the concept is the supposition that the British Government has the same relationship with unionists as Dublin has with nationalists. This is not so.

It is undemocratic. It tends to isolate the governors from the governed, leaving the administration remote from and unrepresentative of the people of Northern Ireland.

It is almost impossible to finance on a permanent basis. All schemes assume that the very high costs involved would be paid by Britain or by external sources. No proposal suggests that British financial support would necessarily prove permanent."

We would add merely that joint authority, however it is disguised, amounts to a change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. It is even contrary to the principle stated in the Downing street declaration. The principle of consent for the people of Northern Ireland, of all faiths and none, is the single most important element in the declaration. That consent is the governing principle in all future arrangements for governing Northern Ireland. That is made clear by the fact that the American Government have underwritten the importance of consent.

It has been common ground among the Northern Ireland parties, at least since 1975, that there should be a Bill of Rights based on the European convention, yet it has also been recognised that, because the convention refers only to individual human rights, which are necessarily qualified, the convention does not fully meet the need. In particular, it does not refer to the rights of communities or minorities.

In recent years, those collective rights have been addressed by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe through the development of the human dimension in the Vienna accord and the charter of Paris. The latter states the principle, which has been worked out in some detail and is mentioned in the fifth paragraph of the charter. It states:

"We affirm that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities will be protected and that persons belonging to national minorities have the right to freely express, preserve and develop that identity without any discrimination and in full equality before the law."

Those standards should regulate the relationship between Britain and Ireland and should safeguard the rights of minorities in each state. Any new agreement between the British and Irish Government to replace the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement or any new institutions of government in Northern Ireland should conform to those standards.

The way in which those standards would be implemented or enforced presents problems. The standards are not really justiciable and would not be suitable for court-type procedures as in many cases they represent the best administrative practice. Regard should also be paid to the first steps taken by the CSCE on implementation, which have taken the form of intergovernmental administrative procedures rather than court-enforced legal procedures. It may be considered appropriate to ensure that

[Mr. Molyneaux]

any implementation provisions in any new agreement are compatible with those that the two Governments have agreed should apply throughout Europe.

Her Majesty's Government have a clear duty urgently to tackle the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland. In "Blueprint for Stability", we have set out what we and many others regard as a fair and practical method of doing that. The second motion on the Order Paper deals with a change in the structure of the governance of Northern Ireland, which appears not to have been subject to the formula

"nothing is agreed until everything is agreed".

The Government are just getting on with it.

I say, with great respect, that Ministers must go further and faster down the road to the restoration of accountable democracy in the Province, where about a third of the population—Protestants and Roman Catholic—fall into the middle-class category. Last weekend, a Sunday newspaper of repute reported rumours of middle-class financial assistance to Loyalist paramilitaries. I warned precisely of that problem during the Queen's Speech debate last November. It is vital that the middle classes do not fall prey to the same disenchantment that has become the norm in so-called working-class Ulster. The House cannot pretend that suspicion does not exist. It must be removed by action, and the time for action is now.

5.6 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On Monday in the House, I asked the Prime Minister a question that was relevant to the constitutional talks in Northern Ireland. It appears in column 561 of Monday's *Hansard*. The thrust of my question was how was it that, if strand 1 talks were to take place again in the same sense as they had taken place in the past, after his talks with the Prime Minister of the Dublin Government, the Prime Minister announced that they had discussed strands 1, 2 and 3. The Prime Minister replied:

"No, my discussions with the Irish Prime Minister were not about strand 1, which has been the subject of discussions between the British Government and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. My discussions with the Irish Prime Minister related to political strands 2 and 3. We still have not achieved agreement, but we are making progress. We have commissioned further work."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 561-62.]

I went to the BBC and obtained a transcript of what the Prime Minister said in Corfu. He stated that there was

"an impediment to progress for a very long time. The question of joint authority is not on the table, what is on the table is a series of things in strand one, strand two and strand three".

At the talks with the Prime Minister of the Dublin Government, the Prime Minister discussed strand 1, 2 and 3, but he said in the House that they had not discussed strand 1.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made a plea for people in Northern Ireland to believe in him; to believe in the Government and to believe in the credibility, integrity and honesty of what they state. When the people of Northern Ireland see night after night the Dublin Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterating the very opposite of what the Secretary of State seems to be saying, and what the Prime Minister at times is saying, how can they trust?

My next quotation comes from the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), who was also speaking on Monday, discussing joint authority. I shall quote from the transcript:

"Joint authority for Northern Ireland—in other words flying the tricolour and the union jack over Belfast city hall. The Secretary of State is going to agree to something even worse; he is going to agree that Northern Ireland and the Republic will be controlled by all-Ireland authorities which will have executive powers over the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. So the man is trying to deceive the Unionist community, and it is time he was exposed."

My attitude, the attitude of my party and the attitude of the majority of unionist electors at the recent elections endorsed that view—that something was afoot.

When he was in America, the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic could not hold himself in; he made a statement that was carried in the *Irish Times* and that formed the basis of a news editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 June. *The Daily Telegraph*'s editorials do not often say things with which I agree, but on that occasion it said:

"Speaking in the United States, he"—

that is, the Taoiseach—

"indicated that Dublin would contemplate dropping Articles II and III of its constitution, which lay claim to the North, only in return for a North-South body that would exercise "executive powers" over aspects of Northern Ireland's government . . .

This is a dangerous pretence. The Unionists are entitled to reject Mr. Reynolds's notions out of hand. If such a plan was ever implemented, the Loyalists of the Shankill Road would perceive it as a Republican victory won by terrorism, and probably respond in kind. The IRA, meanwhile, would perceive it as an encouraging halfway house, endorsing their legitimacy. Only John Hume's Nationalist SDLP would wholeheartedly welcome such an arrangement. That would be scant consolation indeed for the British Government, which would have to pick up the pieces as yet another constitutional experiment ended in bloodshed and tears across the province . . .

But in the meantime, it is deeply irresponsible of Dublin to allow the tail to wag the dog. Articles II and III are at the root of the Irish problem. They embody and perpetuate Unionist distrust of the South. Their removal should be viewed by Dublin not as the culmination of any peace process, but as its starting point."

And that is where we need to start today.

I am amazed that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), leading for Her Majesty's Opposition, put forward at the Dispatch Box a defence of something that is not only illegal under international law and criminal under practical law, but immoral—the defence of articles 2 and 3. The hon. Gentleman knows well that those articles have no standing in any international court, and no standing in law. If the southern Government thought that they had any standing in an international court, they would have taken them there long ago.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Surely my hon. Friend will agree that the only people who will be delighted by the speech made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) at the Dispatch Box—especially the part about the rigged democracy that he suggests for the people of Northern Ireland and the part about sovereignty—will be the terrorists and the republican propagandists.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, I was coming to that.

First we find the Labour party spokesman attacking any concept of majority rule in Northern Ireland. He says, "You cannot have majority rule." That is very different from the Taoiseach's concept of majority rule. At his meeting with the Irish Association in Dublin on 10

January, Albert Reynolds was asked if he would consider a 51 per cent. majority in favour of Irish unity as sufficient consent for change. He replied:

"not 51 per cent.—50 per cent. plus one".

So there are two standards. The standard for the south is a majority, but Northern Ireland cannot have majority rule—

Mr. Mallon *rose—*

Rev. Ian Paisley: I cannot give way, because of the time. I have made a promise and I shall try to keep to it.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that particular point?

Rev. Ian Paisley: No. I made a promise and I have to keep to it. I regret not being able to give way. We should have had plenty of time to discuss the matter.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North went further. I intervened and he graciously gave way to me, although he may be sorry that he did so. Now he says that we cannot have proportional majority rule either. If certain segments of a Northern Ireland assembly formed a coalition and achieved a majority, that would not be allowed either. The hon. Gentleman's idea is to elevate a minority into the same area of equality as the real majority. That is what this is all about. How can there be a settlement on those terms? It is absolutely impossible.

Of course, the Secretary of State talks about consent. I find that revolting to the people of Northern Ireland. What consent was asked of the people of Northern Ireland for the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I shall not give way. I say to the right hon. Gentleman, who when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland presided over that awful situation, that he knew in practical values what consent was achieved. There was no consent to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We were not asked to give consent. He himself said that, although people had resigned their seats, the Government did not care what the results of the elections were—the result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was here to stay. That is what he thinks of democracy. We have been through all that.

What sort of assembly shall we have if we cannot have majority rule, or even proportional majority rule? It is a system that cannot work. And of course, people have a vested interest in seeing that it does not work.

What about the matter of consent? The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) told us that there was a great pillar—

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: No.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke said that the pillar of that wonderful consent was something about which we should be very glad. I would like to think that the people of Northern Ireland alone would have the opportunity to give their consent. But while the Secretary of State stands up in the House and tells us, "Oh yes, it is the people of Northern Ireland alone who will have the right to give consent," out in America, the Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic says something entirely different. He says:

"We will use all our resources to persuade both communities in Northern Ireland into new arrangements which are honourable in terms of their past, just and fair in terms of the present, and equally open in terms of the future to whatever political model commands consent across the entire spectrum of the Irish people."

He makes it absolutely clear that it is nothing to do with the people of Northern Ireland.

That view was tested by me at Hillsborough house when the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the leader of the Ulster Unionists, was present, as were the leader of the Alliance party and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party. I said, "You can have a settlement in Northern Ireland, Prime Minister, by going to the people now and asking the question that is asked in the border poll legislation, and let the people settle it." The other three leaders all agreed with the Prime Minister that there should be no going to people on the border poll legislation, so the people will not have that opportunity.

I was not in the House after the election when the Secretary of State said that the people had given their consent because in the election, the majority of people voted for the Downing street declaration and the peace process, or at least were to some extent quiescent about it. One can see how ridiculous that is by reading the manifestos of those standing, as I did. I heard the hon. Member for Foyle say that the election had nothing to do with the peace process and that I should not even be permitted to bring in the matter because it had nothing to do with the election, which was about Europe. What is more, the Ulster Unionist party took a similar attitude on the matter.

One candidate did not take that attitude—the Conservative candidate. Let us look at the vote that was recorded for the Conservative candidate, who was ably canvassed for by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. She got 5,583 votes—0.99 per cent. of the entire vote of the Province. Yet the Government then say that there is consent. There is no consent in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman knows that because I have already told him.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman knows what I want to ask. That is why he will not give way.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I do not.

Rev. William McCrea: You never made him afraid before, Seamus, and you will not do it now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The matter today is all-important to the people of Northern Ireland because if we are not to have the solid rock of democratic principles as a base, we will not have this shamrock of a Downing street declaration. If we do not have the solid rock of democratic principles, we shall not proceed very far.

Is there any House in the world where the main Opposition spokesman would get up and talk as we have heard the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North talk today? He said that we could not have even proportional representation. He should tell South Africa that it should not have proportional representation because it is not democratic. He says that we cannot have majority rule and, therefore, that we cannot have proportional representation.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

The issue will have to be decided by the choice of the people. Mr. Churchill used to say, "Trust the people." Why will the people of Northern Ireland not have the opportunity to decide their own future by the ballot box? I know the reason why. It was given by Garret Fitzgerald in his book, "All in a Life". He says that joint sovereignty is

"simply a method that the British Government might choose to adopt in the exercise of its sovereignty in order to regulate the affairs of one part of the Kingdom."

That is what has happened. Joint sovereignty has come in because the British Government are prepared now to share with the Government of the Irish Republic the way in which our country is to be governed and the way in which its future is to be decided. That spells disaster for our Province.

Many people in Northern Ireland are deeply troubled about what happened in the coroner's court concerning the Teban accident. I would like an assurance from the Secretary of State that he will have a careful look at the matter because many hearts that have already been broken will be rent asunder again by what happened in that court, as he knows. I trust that something will be done to mend that.

5.26 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I will not indulge in the ranting to which we have just listened and which we are fed up with listening to in Northern Ireland. We have heard in today's rant, once again, everything that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) is against and, once again, we have not heard what he is for in dealing with the problem.

As the Secretary of State has pointed out, the order is a reminder that the very first principle of democracy does not exist in Northern Ireland—agreement on how the people are governed. In fact, it has never existed in Northern Ireland. Such agreement is the basis of order in any society. It is self-evident that anyone who wanted to provide the basis for lasting stability would be totally committed to reaching agreement among our divided people.

I very much welcome the fact, therefore, that the Secretary of State and the Government have committed themselves totally to such agreement, together with the Irish Government. It is the duty of all parties to commit themselves to such agreement. Surely at the end of the day, agreement threatens no section of the people. No one doubts that, given the attitudes that exist, such agreement might be difficult to reach, but at least we should give people on the ground hope by being at the table and staying there until we reach agreement. I hope that that will happen soon, that the challenge that has been thrown down by both Governments in the Downing street declaration will be faced up to by everyone and that we can come to the table in an atmosphere where the gun and the bomb have gone for ever.

5.28 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): I say to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) that we all share his desire to see a settlement reached and an agreement reached between the parties and, indeed, between the two Governments. That is very much the background to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said in his opening remarks, and it is certainly very much central to the Government's policy in relation to the political situation in Northern Ireland.

I do not have a great deal of time in which to deal with all the points raised in this short, but very interesting and constructive debate. I shall deal with a few of the specific questions and with one or two of the points which should either be corrected or put into perspective.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) asked a number of specific questions. He asked first whether I could give an idea of the timetable of the framework document. There are no artificial time constraints in putting together a framework document, and it is important that there are not, because obviously it is a complex matter and we need to take the time needed to achieve agreement, if agreement is possible. So, it would be wrong to say that the document would be ready by a certain date or not ready by another date. I am sure that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North appreciates that that is the most responsible position we can take on that difficult matter at the moment.

The hon. Gentleman asked again about what he saw to be the nub of disagreement. There are a number of difficult areas, as he would expect, which the two Governments are discussing. It would be totally wrong to try to conduct those discussions in the full glare of publicity. Indeed, to try to do so, I suspect, would make it even more difficult to achieve a meeting of minds. I am therefore sure that, again, he will understand if I do not go into the details of what is being discussed in the talks on the framework document beyond what my right hon. and learned Friend said in his opening remarks.

As to the publication of the framework document, it is obvious that, if we are to achieve the widespread or broad-spread agreement of the people of Northern Ireland at some time, they will have to see and be able to take a view of what is being proposed. Again, it must be a matter for political judgment of when the right time for that to happen is reached.

I very much appreciate the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). Once again, he has shown not only his great interest but his knowledge of the political situation in the Province, and I thought that his speech was both reasoned and sensible. He underlined, as I shall again, that the bottom line to everything taking place is the need to achieve widespread agreement. That is the practical reality. Our history is littered with the wreckage of imposed solutions.

Mr. Trimble: On that point, may I refer the Minister to the intervention made in the speech of his hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), in which the latter drew the utterly false distinction between changes which relate only to sovereignty and those which relate to cross-border institutions of a merely administrative nature, which he said would not require consent?

In his reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North, the Minister's hon. Friend appeared to endorse that view, and confined the requirement of consent to so-called sovereignty changes, and not to the sort of cross-border institutions to which he was referring. I give the Minister the opportunity to correct that, and make it clear that there would be no question of any cross-border institution being created without the freely given consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: We have made it clear, and I make it clear again, that the political settlement, which includes all three strands, not only strand 2, will require the widespread or broad-spread agreement of the people of Northern Ireland. The quotation cited by my right hon. and learned Friend of the Taoiseach's speech at Oxford made it clear that that is also the view of the Irish Government. I can only reiterate that to the hon. Gentleman.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) referred to the history of the talks up to November 1992. There is a difference of view about the nature of those talks. In my understanding of what he said, he suggested that there had been a sequential basis to those talks.

I have looked up the original statement in 1991, and it is clear that there was not a sequential system proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), the then Secretary of State. In fact, he was saying at that time that, although the parties would start with strand 1, at a moment which he judged to be appropriate, it would launch into the other two strands.

In a sense, that is rather different from what the right hon. Gentleman was saying. May I say to him again that, when we talk of strand 1 being banked and then looking at strand 2, we are not talking in theory. We have to talk about the practical realities. The practical realities of the situation, as I have learned in the talks over the past year, is that we shall not achieve agreement on strand 1 without achieving agreement on strand 2 as well. There is an inevitable and unavoidable interlocking of all the strands, and it is for that reason—the political reality of the situation—that all those strands have to, and will, be looked at together.

The right hon. Gentleman also called again for us to tackle the democratic deficit. He will understand from what my right hon. and learned Friend said that that is also very much the earnest desire of Her Majesty's Government. However, the way in which that democratic deficit can be tackled and met is by moving the process of dialogue forward, until we reach a situation in which we can achieve a political settlement and within which those institutions can be provided again for the Province.

I shall turn briefly to the speech of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). I am afraid that, again, he made a number of assertions which bear little connection with reality. He first spoke about joint authority and joint sovereignty. I can only say to him, again, that it is the stated position of both the British and Irish Governments that joint authority is not being considered.

The hon. Gentleman may find that he would have a closer and a better understanding of how the process of dialogue is proceeding if he were to accept my invitation, which I renew today, to come to the talks that I am having with the constitutional parties. He would then begin to see the type of structures that we are discussing to try to achieve a political settlement.

In particular, the hon. Gentleman raised the question of strand 1 and whether that was part of the discussions with the Irish Government. The discussions with the Irish Government, as with the parties, are about the overall package, which includes, by its nature, all three strands. However, we have made it absolutely clear that the specifics of strand 1 are matters for the British Government and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. That has been the position, and it remains the position.

I say again to the hon. Gentleman that he can set up as many Aunt Sallys as he likes, he may draw as many black scenarios as he wishes, but, at the end of the day, they all have to be subjected to the test of acceptability to the people of Northern Ireland. [HON. MEMBERS: "And the House."] And this House. It is for that reason that many of the suggestions which he makes will be shown up for what they are: scare tactics and unhelpful to any settlement being achieved.

I believe that we are moving to a situation in which there is a genuine hope that peace can be achieved and a political settlement can be arrived at. But it will not be advanced by shouted slogans, by wild assertions, by blazing headlines or by megaphone diplomacy. It will be taken forward only by steady progress, careful language and the will among all those who participate to achieve a settlement. We have that goal in mind—not only to achieve the rightful, peaceful life for people in Northern Ireland, but so that we never again have to come back to the House to ask for the order to continue once more.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 24th May, be approved.

Civil Service (Northern Ireland)

5.37 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): I beg to move,

That the draft Civil Service (Management Functions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 3rd May, be approved.

The order's sole purpose—I emphasise sole purpose—is to allow the Department of Finance and Personnel to delegate to other servants of the Crown its responsibilities for the management of the Northern Ireland civil service. At the end of 1992, Parliament approved the Civil Service (Management Functions) Bill, which enabled the central Departments in the home civil service to delegate their management functions. The order before the House introduces for the Northern Ireland civil service provisions corresponding to the effect of that legislation.

The order is concerned with the way in which civil servants are managed in such matters as pay and grading structures, allowances, promotion, probation, staff appraisal and so on. Under the present arrangements, the DFP has the responsibility for determining those matters for the entirety of 30,000 Northern Ireland civil servants.

In the existing legal framework, the Department of Finance and Personnel has been able to give Departments and agencies some discretion in respect of day-to-day personnel management arrangements. The DFP must continue to exercise general management and control. In the view of the Government, it is not in the interests of good management and efficiency that that constraint should exist.

I want to make it clear, however, that the order has nothing to do with privatisation, market testing or the removal of functions from the public sector, which I know is a concern raised by some Opposition Members when the Civil Service (Management Functions) Bill was being debated. It concerns itself only with the management of the Northern Ireland civil service.

Nor does the order introduce any new powers; rather, it facilitates a redistribution of existing powers. Under the Civil Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, the Department of Finance and Personnel is responsible for the general management and control of the Northern Ireland civil service. The proposed legislation will allow powers that are currently discharged centrally to be exercised by managers in Departments and agencies, but within a proper framework of accountability. Recipients of delegations will be made clearly responsible for the exercise of a function, but the ultimate accountability of a Minister to Parliament remains intact.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I thank the Minister for giving way on the question of delegations and accountability. During the passage of the Civil Service (Management Functions) Bill, the Government gave an important undertaking that they would find a procedure by which an annual report would be made to the House to ensure that the people and, indeed, hon. Members would know what had been delegated and when, and that that accountability could take place.

I should be grateful if the Minister—I do not require an immediate answer; he may deal with it later—could give a similar undertaking that a mechanism will be found, whether by way of written answer, statement or whatever, to enable us to know what delegations have taken place, so that an account of these matters may be kept.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me that that position was set out when the original Bill was passing through the House. Obviously, in general terms, it is our intention to try to reflect the same position with regard to Northern Ireland. I shall check whether any detailed arrangements have been made in that regard, and I will either answer the question towards the end of this debate or write to the hon. Gentleman on the matter.

The delegation of responsibility, which this order permits, will assist the Government's aim of bringing about improved service and better value for money for the citizen through better management of the public service. Even allowing for the difference in scale between the Northern Ireland civil service and its counterpart in Great Britain, it makes no sense to manage such a diverse organisation, engaged in almost the whole range of government, as though it were a single business.

Next steps agencies, which employ almost 9,000 staff in Northern Ireland, are expected to meet clear objectives and targets within given budgets. To insist upon a regime of central management and control where this would have an inhibiting effect is contrary to the desire to achieve the objectives of the organisation concerned to the quality of outputs required. The Northern Ireland civil service takes more than £700 million of taxpayers' money a year in running costs. We must be free to ensure that such a large sum can be used to best effect.

I should perhaps say something about why legislation is needed to achieve the purpose of better management of public services. The Northern Ireland civil service is separate from the home civil service in Great Britain and, until direct rule, it operated under the direction and control of local political institutions. As with the home civil service, the management of the Northern Ireland civil service is a matter within the scope of the royal prerogative.

The power to determine the terms and conditions of civil servants is delegated by the Crown to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and is exercisable through the Department of Finance and Personnel. The functions now exercised by that Department have been the subject of orders transferring them in 1975 and 1982; and that parliamentary intervention means that further primary legislation is needed to allow the Department of Finance and Personnel to delegate its management responsibilities to Departments and agencies.

Issues raised by the order were extensively debated during the course of the Civil Service (Management Functions) Bill some 18 months ago. I think that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was involved in some of those discussions, and he will appreciate that many of these issues were aired at that time. Similar points to many of those raised then have arisen during the consultation process on this order as well: for instance, concerns about accountability, and fragmentation of the civil service.

Although no changes have been made to the substance of the proposed legislation, all the issues brought forward were examined very carefully and responded to in detail. Where a delegation is being taken to introduce changes more suited to the business objectives of a Department or

agency, there will be consultation in the usual way with the staff concerned and their representatives, just as discussions have already taken place with the civil service trade unions about procedures for consultation on delegations. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that those discussions have proceeded satisfactorily.

Fears were also expressed that the high standard of conduct and impartiality of Northern Ireland civil servants, and the service's record in promoting equality of opportunity, might be damaged by an absence of central control. On the contrary; encouraging ownership of responsibility should enhance the strong sense of duty which characterises our civil service in Northern Ireland, and to which I pay a tribute. I can also assure the House that the fundamentals of Government policy in areas such as equality of opportunity will remain inviolate, and essential standards of conduct will, of course, continue to be the subject of whatever central rules are necessary to safeguard them.

I turn briefly to the main provisions of the order. I hope to demonstrate to the House that this is a limited piece of legislation. It enables the Department of Finance and Personnel to make delegations, but does not compel it to do so. Each Department and agency will decide whether having responsibility for management decisions would help to improve its organisational efficiency and performance, so there is no coercion about it.

Article 3 limits delegations to functions related to the personnel management of the Northern Ireland civil service, and permits delegation of those functions only to servants of the Crown. That means that the order cannot be used to transfer management functions outside the public service, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland remains fully accountable for those functions.

The Department of Finance and Personnel remains the legal holder of the powers. While the intention is to give managers in Departments and agencies appropriate freedoms, the Department may attach any conditions it considers necessary to a delegation. Furthermore—this is important—it may withdraw a delegation at any time.

There are some civil servants who work in bodies which were created by statute—for example, the Public Record Office and the Land Registry. Their management is not determined by the civil service order because the statute creating the bodies specifies arrangements for the appointment and management of their staff. Typically, the Department of Finance and Personnel is required to approve their terms and conditions of service. Article 4 allows the Department to relinquish central control of the management of those bodies, just as it may do in the case of the rest of the Northern Ireland civil service under Article 3.

The Northern Ireland citizens' charter pledged to improve the standard of service to the public. I know from my own experience that Northern Ireland Departments and agencies are determined to live up to that pledge. This order enables them to have access to management flexibilities to help to achieve that goal, and I commend it to the House.

5.47 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On behalf of the Opposition, I wish to oppose the order. As the Minister explained, the main provision in the order allows the Department of Finance and Personnel to delegate any management function of the Northern Ireland civil service to any servant of the Crown; that is, it enables the Northern Ireland civil service to be dismembered, to reduce pay and conditions and, sadly, to undermine the morale of the civil servants. In common language, what we are looking at is dismemberment of the civil service in Northern Ireland. The implications of the order reach across all civil service Departments and are likely to have adverse effects on standards, accountability and impartiality.

The Government are planning to effect major changes to the structure and workings of the Northern Ireland civil service through an enabling order which pays scant regard to the views of the civil servants themselves and elected Members of this House. Article 3 of the order enables the Department of Finance and Personnel to create a service which is so disparate as to render the concept of a Northern Ireland civil service meaningless.

The provisions in the order highlight the failure of Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office to look at the measures in the unique context of Northern Ireland. Again, in their lust after legislation which has already been passed and applied to Great Britain, Ministers have failed to recognise that the Northern Ireland civil service is a separate service under the Crown, and the unfortunate absence of local democratic oversight, which we have debated this afternoon, adds a distinct dimension to the work of the civil servants in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland civil service is comparatively small and, at approximately 25,000 people, is only the size of a small Government Department in Britain. Yet the Government have gone for complete overkill in trying to treat what amounts to one Government Department in the same way as they have treated the whole of the British civil service.

It is nonsense, and wasteful of taxpayers' resources, to insist that each Department and agency—no matter how small—must have the right to attempt to set up, manage and police its own pay and grading structures, conditions of employment, individual systems for recruiting staff and the personnel and management of staff. Ministers have referred to "unnecessary central control", but managers in the Northern Ireland civil service already enjoy considerable freedom, and there is no evidence that they are clamouring for more flexibility.

If each Department within the Northern Ireland civil service is allowed to go its own separate way in relation to recruitment and promotion of staff and, in consequence, in pay and conditions of employment, the unity of the Northern Ireland civil service could be fundamentally undermined.

The Minister failed to tell the House if the present high standards of impartiality within the Northern Ireland civil service will be guaranteed. Surely numerous delegated bodies operating as arms of the civil service also implies a wide variance in standards. It is vital that the Northern Ireland civil service maintains its reputation for impartiality.

In a divided society, it is essential that the institutions of Government set the highest standards in terms of equality of opportunity in employment and in the provision of service. The Northern Ireland civil service has in recent years provided a model for fair employment provisions and affirmative action programmes. It is only right that the

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

instruments of government set an example in the implementation of provisions within the Fair Employment Act and the sex discrimination order.

If the order is implemented, such a co-ordinated and centralised approach to equal opportunities would, we believe, be lost. It is generally accepted that, unfortunately, the political situation in Northern Ireland often spills over into the workplace. Personnel management in Northern Ireland is therefore extremely complex and requires a high degree of expertise, both from managers and trade union representatives of employees.

The anti-discrimination legislation to deal with the problem is unique to Northern Ireland. Fair employment practices in Northern Ireland are of national and international political interest, and we are extremely concerned that, by exercising the powers under article 3 of the order, the Department of Finance and Personnel could dissipate the existing expertise to an unacceptable level.

It will be difficult to maintain the current standards under a regime of delegation, because the intention is to keep to a minimum the monitoring at the centre of the Northern Ireland civil service. The Northern Ireland civil service has been actively promoting greater equality of opportunity. However, the momentum for that derives from the fact that it has been driven from the centre.

Over the years, the Northern Ireland civil service has developed high standards of conduct, but they will be eroded if common ideals are no longer prescribed by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Complaints against members of the civil service for breaches of confidence, conflicts of interest and corruption have been minimal. However, that record has been achieved by the reinforcement at the centre of the need for the highest standards. If that force were removed, there is a danger that standards would be relaxed.

The order could potentially severely damage the equity principle on which the civil service is based. That would further damage the morale of civil servants, with potentially harmful effects to the services which they currently deliver. Creating a culture of insecurity and equity in relation to terms and conditions of employment in the Northern Ireland civil service is not likely to make the organisation function more effectively. Fear, greed, resentment and jealousy do not lead to better performance. Rather, they place the self-advancement and survival of the individual above the sense of public service.

In a community such as Northern Ireland, that would be a tragedy. Already there is resentment within the Northern Ireland civil service, and some feel that they have been treated partially compared with colleagues. There are clear signs that that attitude is on the increase, fostered by performance-related pay schemes, where perceived identical levels of performance have been rewarded differently in different Departments.

If the order is implemented, the chief executives of the agencies which are to be hived off will be able to introduce new terms and conditions. That would inevitably add to the sense of resentment which is already growing as new layers of pay differentials are imposed.

We are concerned that article 3 of the order allows functions to be delegated to any servant of the Crown. That may remove the function concerned from immediate parliamentary scrutiny. The power which the order grants to delegate management functions represents a dramatic erosion of ministerial accountability to Parliament.

The Minister of State said that the Secretary of State would of course be responsible, but we have seen what has happened in Departments and agencies after delegation. A matter goes to an agency manager who writes a letter which then appears in the *Official Report.* Ministers are gradually shouldering off their specific responsibilities for the day-to-day running of Departments.

If the order is implemented, there will be no clear line of accountability between Northern Ireland agencies and Departments and Parliament. The order would therefore continue the trend of diminishing direct parliamentary accountability.

The term "servant of the Crown" is not defined anywhere in legislation. Therefore, depending on how the Government decide to interpret that, the order could potentially enable Ministers to delegate functions to persons who are not normally regarded as civil servants. They would not be subject to democratic accountability and would have no obligation to Parliament. For example, a private company which was given a service could say that the prime responsibility of the people running that company was to the shareholders, not to Parliament or the Secretary of State.

A person to whom a function is delegated can further delegate the function to another servant of the Crown. In that way, the order allows the exercise of functions to become increasingly remote from the central apparatus of accountability.

The circumstances in which the civil service operates in Northern Ireland are not same as those in Britain. The Government have made no attempt to recognise the differences, and have merely replicated the British legislation for Northern Ireland. In a divided society, it is vital that the civil service is seen to be impartial and committed to the principles of neutrality and equality.

At present, the Northern Ireland civil service is seen as being an employer at the forefront of the movement to ensure fair employment and equality of opportunity. That position will be jeopardised by the implementation of the order and, for those reasons, we shall oppose it.

5.56 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The order simply mirrors and applies the provisions of the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992 to Northern Ireland, and that has been made perfectly clear by the previous two speakers. It is, of course, a technical order but, like most apparently innocent technical orders, it has consequences downstream which I think deserve rather more careful examination than would normally be given.

I begin by asking the Minister the reasons for the various textual changes which have been made between the proposal for the draft order and its publication. For instance, article 2(2) of the order has simply disappeared, and articles 3 and 4(4) seem to have been completely rewritten. I am curious as to the technical reasons for the changes. Do they make any real changes to the meaning of the order, or is it simply a neater and clearer way of expressing the same meaning as was in the original draft? Do they arise because of the passing of the legislation for Great Britain? We are entitled to a full explanation of why the changes have been made.

We understand that the structure of the civil service in Northern Ireland is not quite the same as it is in Great Britain, in that there are no heads of Department, as the term is understood over here, in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the "heads of Department" were laid down as the members of the 1973 Northern Ireland executive, and they were to be politicians. There are now no such persons in Northern Ireland, although I notice that the term "head of a Department" is used in the last sentence of the order. Perhaps the Government are keeping on a little bit of insurance or at least paying the insurance premiums just in case we have an Executive in Northern Ireland in the future.

Regardless of that, however, I must express my reservations about the transfer of management functions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) did during the debate on the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992, which applies to the rest of the United Kingdom. That transfer, like all transfers of power to agencies and quangos, will create even greater problems for hon. Members, because they will then express their concerns to the Ministers who are ultimately responsible without any hope of having an effect.

We have seen from similar transfers that Ministers tend to shrug off various obligations, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said, so that their own ultimate responsibility is diminished. Everything is handled at arm's length. Within the United Kingdom context of government, that is wrong. The buck should stop on the Minister's desk, but he is quietly moving it to someone else's. I do not believe that that is acceptable.

We need a system of government and administration which allows hon. Members to call Ministers to account, but once that is made more difficult, the quality of the services under examination will eventually fall.

Ministers are giving powers away to others, often to their own creatures. They can then say, "Look, my hands are clean, but I will ask the person I have appointed to write to the hon. Member." In other words, Ministers will simply dodge the responsibilities that they took on when they stood before the electorate and said, "Vote for me. I am capable of doing all these wonderful things. I am capable of actually running a Department of Government. I am capable of answering questions. The buck does stop on my desk and I will answer for it." I am sorry to note that the Minister of State is going along with that principle. Perhaps he would like to shuffle off some of his responsibilities elsewhere.

The debate in the other place on the Civil Service (Management Functions) Bill took place on 7 July 1992, just two years ago. That is the normal time it takes before Northern Ireland catches up with the rest of Great Britain, unlike the happy position that we once enjoyed of leading the rest of the state. Lord Howe said that the transfer of functions included all aspects of the determination of pay and other conditions of service in the civil service. He said that the Bill was intended to cover those functions.

The proposed changes are therefore substantial and I fear that the consequences will not be altogether happy. I fear that the downstream consequences will go much further than the Government are prepared to admit.

The Government are, once again, introducing legislation and putting changes into effect that may be used as a rod to beat their own back should they cross to the Opposition Benches. They seem to forget that they will not always be in office. The changes will lead to the delegation of functions, not of civil servants, and they will alter dramatically how Northern Ireland is governed and administered.

When the Minister replies to the debate, perhaps he can tell us whether he has discussed that change in the governance of Northern Ireland with his counterparts in the Irish Republic. Were there any discussions with Dublin? If not, have the Irish Government expressed any annoyance at being left out of the reckoning in this matter? Or perhaps the Government are finally beginning to reverse the disastrous decisions that they accepted in 1985. Are they really now saying, "Yes, we will govern Northern Ireland as we desire. That is the way it is because that is the way in which the United Kingdom is run." I hope that there was no agreement with Dublin, and I hope that the Government have been their own man in this matter.

I fear that the changes will lead to the break-up of the Northern Ireland civil service. I also believe that they will place the high standards of confidentiality in Northern Ireland in jeopardy. There is no place in the kingdom where such strict confidentiality about individuals is more needed than in Northern Ireland, with all the terrorist dangers that surround many people, especially servants of the Crown. Their names float around various sections of the civil service and the dangers accruing to those individuals, should there be a leak of information, are quite appalling.

Another problem is the possibility of regionalisation of pay, conditions and grading. That matter should concern everyone. A considerable number of United Kingdom civil servants as well as Northern Irish ones work in the Province. Many functions that are carried out there apply throughout the United Kingdom. Various aspects of civil service and Government work have been centralised in various places and we have been fortunate that some centralised services have been moved to the Province. That is welcome because a large part of the economy of Northern Ireland depends on the money paid in salaries and other expenses to those civil servants. If wages were forced down in the interests of greater competition, the entire economy of the Province would suffer. None of us wants to see that. We want national standards to prevail across the board.

Another danger is that the pressure and interference exerted by the Fair Employment Commission will increase with regard to recruitment in Northern Ireland. The most recent report from the Fair Employment Commission on the civil service of Northern Ireland noted that it employed considerably more Roman Catholics than their number within the general population required. It held that that was fair, so we can expect further application of such fairness to the detriment of many other people in Northern Ireland. I expect that the Government will live to rue the day that they fragmented the Northern Ireland civil service and broke up its various sections, because that will allow all the evils that I have detailed to flourish.

Every time responsibility is shuffled off Parliament is denied an opportunity for debate. I much regret that step. It will allow changes to be concealed unless the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann is acted on. I hope that the Minister will give a favourable reply, because at least we would then know what fool decisions had been made, even if we are not allowed to discuss them beforehand.

The number of 25,000 civil servants has been bandied about, but I checked and the number listed as employees of

[Mr. William Ross]

the Northern Ireland civil service is larger than that—it has full-time equivalents of 27,661. That must be set against the total home civil service number of 546,339. In national terms, we are talking about a small number of people. There is no reason why Ministers should not be able to exercise their functions under the present system, which has worked well. I regret that the Government have clearly never heard of the advice, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," never mind tried to act on it. If there is something wrong, we have not been told. If there is nothing wrong, why fix it?

As far as we are aware, the current system works well. It is widely accepted as fair and reasonable. It is being unnecessarily upset and ruptured simply because some folk seem to be intent on endless change. They want to give the impression of renewal and advance, but, at the end of the day, we will probably wind up in a rather worse state than that in which we started.

6.8 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I do not intend to speak at length on this subject, although I am tempted to do so because, due to the mismanagement of the House's proceedings by the business managers and usual channels, we have 58 minutes left to debate it. With all due respect to the Northern Ireland civil service, the previous debate was much more important, but it had to be truncated without the subject being properly discussed.

The Minister will be also be relieved to hear that I do not intend to go into matters of substance, although I am tempted to do so because I served on the Committee that dealt with the Civil Service (Management Functions) Bill when it went through the House a couple of years ago. The substance of the matter is tangled and involved, so I shall simply ask the Minister a few questions on procedural aspects.

The order began as a purely mechanical operation to extend the 1992 Act to Northern Ireland. It was to be a negative resolution order, which would not have been debated in the House. Two years have elapsed since then. I have complained before about the Northern Ireland Office's inefficiency in handling Order in Council procedures and the fact that it cannot even run its squalid direct rule system effectively. Although the reason for delay in this case may be other than the usual inefficiency of the Northern Ireland Office, will the Minister spell out the factors that have caused a two-year delay?

That question touches on points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), who drew attention to differences between the proposal for the draft order and the draft order now before the House. I presume that the proposal for a draft order was based on the 1992 Act. The order before us has evidently been changed. Given that it started as a parity measure extending to Northern Ireland legislation that operates in England and Wales and that it was to go through by negative resolution without debate, will the Minister say not only what those changes are and why they have been made, but whether the changes now reverse parity in England and Wales? Having adjusted the order to meet circumstances in Northern Ireland, should not we re-examine the 1992 Act?

6.12 pm

Mr. Ancram: The whole House will have welcomed this constructive and interesting, if short, debate. As much as I enjoy listening to speeches by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), I am glad that he did not succumb to the temptation to interest the House for a lengthy period. I speak for the whole House in saying that I listened to his brief, succinct remarks with interest.

A number of points have been raised. At the beginning of the debate, the hon. Member for Upper Bann asked me about the undertaking to report to Parliament, which has been given in relation to the legislation that was passed some time ago. I told him that I understood that that position would be reflected as regards Northern Ireland, and that is correct. A report will be provided to Parliament periodically on the delegations made by the Department of Finance and Personnel, but the precise content of the report is yet to be decided. It is likely to follow the format of the written answer on delegations in the home civil service printed in the *Official Report* in January this year, which provided details of the nature of the delegations granted, the recipients and the main conditions attached to the delegations. I hope that the hon. Gentleman feels reassured that that safeguard will be built in. I do not wish to confirm the report's precise content. Once it is known, I shall arrange for a letter to be sent to the hon. Gentleman explaining that, if he so wishes.

The hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) raised the important matter of accountability, particularly parliamentary accountability, for management of the Northern Ireland civil service under the order. Like that of the home civil service, management of the Northern Ireland civil service is within the royal prerogative, but nothing in the order affects Parliament's right to raise questions about how it is managed. The order does not affect the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's direct accountability to Parliament for the general management and control of the Northern Ireland civil service. That accountability remains the same. In addition, as I have just said, there will be an annual report. Together, those will provide a sufficient safeguard.

Both hon. Members asked about the order's effect on equal opportunities and fair employment. Departments and agencies operate within the Northern Ireland civil service policy statement on equality of opportunity, which is underpinned by equal opportunity and fair employment legislation. Obviously, Departments and agencies to which delegations are granted must comply with the law. They will be expected to operate in a manner, and retain in place policies and procedures, reflecting the well established priority of fair participation in employment in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North also asked about the term "servant of the Crown". The term is limited to those in Crown service and cannot apply to anyone outside the public service. In that respect, accountability to Parliament for all delegations will remain with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East asked about changes between the proposed draft and the draft order currently before the House. The amendments to the original order were substantive and did not alter the legislation's intent. Two of the changes clarified the terms of the proposal published in August 1993 and the

amendment to article 3(1) reflected the constitutional position in respect of the management of the Northern Ireland civil service, and brought the wording of the order closer to the terminology in the Letters Patent and Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973. Paragraph 4(4) of the proposal for a draft order was found unnecessary because there were no statutory bodies where the approval of two Departments was required to exercise a power relating to the management of staff. That is why the changes were made.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East also asked whether officials in the Republic of Ireland had been consulted. The proposal for a draft order was sent to a number of organisations. Several of them have a general interest in the proposed legislation and some were party leaders, who were invited to comment. In addition, notification of the proposal's publication was placed in the Belfast *Gazette*. Two comments were received from trade union representatives on the central Whitley council. There was no such consultation with the Republic of Ireland.

Finally, the hon. Member for Upper Bann asked why the order had taken so long. He will recall that, when the original legislation was going through, he spoke out against the negative resolution procedure because the affirmative procedure would allow greater consultation and for comments to be made and taken into account. His comments were listened to on this occasion and the procedure which we are pursuing today is in accordance with what he requested. The effect is that a certain amount of time is taken up in the consultation process.

This useful debate has covered a number of points. Ultimately, some will always believe that there is a hidden agenda, but in this case there is none. The draft order will simply enable delegation by the DFP of its management and control responsibilities. It must be prudent in taking such powers to allow appropriate management action to be taken.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East asked why we should fix something if it was not broken. I have heard that adage before. If we took that as our guiding principle in life, many improvements that have been made would not have come about because the measures which they replaced were not broken. I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 126, Noes 37.

Division No. 278] **[6.18 pm**

AYES

Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Bates, Michael
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Conway, Derek
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Wavaney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Hughes and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Barnes, Harry
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Gerrard, Neil
Gordon, Mildred
Harvey, Nick
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
McNamara, Kevin
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morley, Elliot
O'Hara, Edward
Pike, Peter L.
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Timms, Stephen
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. John Spellar.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Civil Service (Management Functions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 3rd May, be approved.

Animal Welfare

6.30 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I beg to move,

That the draft Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 14th June, be approved.

How appropriate that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, should be in the Chair for this debate on animal welfare. The main purpose of the measure is to implement European directives and our commitments to the Council of Europe in respect of animal welfare. It is being introduced after full consultation with the industry, welfare organisations and other interested parties.

Although the size of the document may appear daunting, that is principally because, as well as making the necessary changes to the legislation, we have taken the opportunity to consolidate five existing statutory instruments. The House will note that there are four schedules to the regulations, relating to battery hens, calves, pigs and other livestock. Previously, anyone trying to establish the welfare requirements relating to pigs would have had to consult three separate statutory instruments, as opposed to the single schedule in the draft regulations.

I will now explain the main changes that we are proposing. First, I should draw the House's attention to the inclusion of a provision in the main body of the regulations which implements an important recommendation made by the admirable Farm Animal Welfare Council, to whose work I am sure the House will want to pay a warm tribute. The council was concerned that wording used in some welfare legislation could militate against a successful prosecution, particularly where a defendant denied knowledge of an animal's condition.

The draft regulation makes it clear that references to a person

"knowingly permitting livestock to be kept"

also encompass those circumstances where a person might reasonably be expected to know how that livestock is kept.

Schedule 1 on battery hens updates the previous Welfare of Battery Hens Regulations 1987, which implement the Community directive of 1986 setting minimum standards for battery hens.

I must now explain a complex problem which arose when the 1987 regulations were made. I hope that the House will enjoy the exceptional clarity of my explanation. The EC directive requires 450 sq cm of floor space for each hen—that is the minimum cage area. Normally, hens are kept four or five to a cage, giving as a minimum an overall cage size of 1,800 to 2,250 sq cm. This gives the birds some flexibility as to the use of space.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose—*

Mr. Soames: I am always happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cohen: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will he confirm that the floor space for hens that he has mentioned is about the size of a sheet of A4 paper?

Mr. Soames: That is perfectly correct. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish my point—whereupon he will, I hope, be clearer about the matter.

Some cages exist in which three, two or one birds are housed. Clearly, 450 sq cm per bird is quite inappropriate when such small numbers are considered, because the birds cannot share space as they can in the larger cages. Our domestic legislation therefore requires 550 sq cm per bird for three-bird cages, 750 sq cm per bird for two-bird cages and 1,000 sq cm for single-bird cages.

Now for the complication. The height of the cage is regulated by reference to the minimum cage area. Although certain three, two or one-bird cages—mainly those known as A-frame cages—meet the requirements in all other respects, their height in relation to the overall floor area will be just short of the minimum required when the minimum area is the higher area specified in United Kingdom law. I know that my hon. Friends are following this closely.

We accepted arguments put forward by the industry to the effect that it would be unreasonable to make such cages illegal from 1995. The change in the regulations before the House will thus ensure that the cage height requirement refers to the minimum cage area set in the directive—450 sq cm per bird—and not that in our domestic legislation, thus permitting continued use of these cages.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): We do, indeed, appreciate the exceptional clarity of my hon. Friend's explanation. Does he agree that there is a small trend away from using battery cages, and that that is to be encouraged? I for one welcome it.

Mr. Soames: Any trends in modern farming in favour of more natural systems are to be welcomed. But there will always be a place for battery cages; they represent a big business. The House should be very careful before pontificating about other systems which are often even less satisfactory than battery cages—but I certainly take my hon. Friend's point.

The measure that we are introducing will, we estimate, save the industry £9 million at current prices without adversely affecting the welfare of the birds concerned.

I will take the schedules relating to calves and pigs together, as the changes proposed to existing requirements are similar. In November 1991, the Council of Ministers adopted Community directives laying down minimum standards for the welfare of calves and pigs. We are, of course, required to implement those directives and are somewhat overdue in doing so.

In addition to setting new space requirements for calves and weaner pigs, the regulations implement, from 1 July 15, a ban on the pig-rearing systems commonly known as sweat boxes. They also introduce certain new provisions which, although numerous, can be summarised as relating to the maintenance of good husbandry.

There are two important respects in which the requirements in these regulations go further than those in the directives. I refer, of course, to the ban on the use of veal crates and the phasing out of close confinement stalls and tethers for pigs.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Before my hon. Friend proceeds any further, can he tell the House when the other European Union countries will ban stalls and tethers?

Mr. Soames: If my hon. Friend will allow me to proceed in an orderly fashion, I shall come to that.

The phase-out of stalls and tethers was first proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), who has a most distinguished record in this field. It was introduced by the Welfare of Pigs Regulations 1991.

which allowed an eight-year phase-in period to the end of 1998—unlike the directive, which requires the phasing out of systems using tethers by the end of 2005 and allows the use of close confinement stalls to continue.

The United Kingdom requirements were in place before the directives were adopted and both were introduced for the soundest reasons of animal welfare. We do not consider, therefore, that, in implementing these directives, we should take a step backwards from our own hard-won and high standards of animal welfare. We voted against the two directives precisely because we were convinced that they did not go far enough, and we shall continue to press for their amendment.

The schedule concerning the welfare of other livestock brings together the requirements contained in the Welfare of Livestock (Intensive Units) Regulations 1978 and the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1990. The intensive units regulations were introduced in 1978 as a result of our commitment to implement the Council of Europe convention on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. That convention has now been amended, requiring contracting parties to amend the definition of intensive farming in their law. The old definition assumed that intensive livestock farming meant the farming of animals in environmentally controlled buildings and required that they be attended on a daily basis to ensure their welfare.

The convention now acknowledges that, particularly in the southern states of Europe, farming systems which are not in buildings may be equally intensive, and that the animals concerned may equally require daily attention if they are not to suffer. Although the change will be of little consequence to farmers in Britain—unless the present warm weather continues—it is necessary to enable us to ratify the amendment to the convention.

By way of clarification, I should explain that the requirements in the schedule are not applied to battery hens, calves and pigs, because, as I explained at the beginning of my speech, those have been catered for in the schedules relating to them.

The regulations maintain our reputation for standards of animal welfare which are among the highest in Europe. Some hon. Members will no doubt be disappointed that we have not taken the opportunity to go further than the directive and impose new requirements for battery cages. I make no apology for that. The decision was an entirely deliberate one on our part.

The way forward, as my colleagues and I have stated on many occasions, is to seek to persuade our European partners of the importance of achieving satisfactory controls on a Community-wide basis.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Soames: I shall press on, if I may.

It may be necessary from time to time for the United Kingdom, in the most honourable manner, to take a lead in that regard. We await the Commission's proposals for amendments to the battery hens directive and will be pressing hard for improved standards.

It will be clear from my remarks that we believe that the Community still has some way to go in establishing satisfactory farm animal welfare standards and that we are ahead of the game in some respects. The ban on veal crates and the impending ban on stalls and tethers provide two examples.

I recognise, as will anyone who has anything to do with farming, that the measures impose extra costs on our farmers which the producers of imported meat do not have to bear. It is only right that those extra burdens should also provide, as I am sure they will, a marketing advantage.

I hope that the welfare organisations will use some of their well-developed publicity skills to emphasise to consumers that they can give real help to the welfare cause by insisting on food produced to the highest welfare standards when they shop or order in restaurants.

Mr. Pike: I should like to press the Minister on one point. I know that he is sympathetic on these issues. Can he assure us that these standards will be observed in the importation of livestock from outside the European Union? The hon. Gentleman says that, in some cases, the standards are still not up to those that we in Britain would want. But we know for a fact that, outside the European Union, standards are even worse than those in other parts of the European Union.

Mr. Soames: It is not possible for me to give that assurance. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to make the point. The standards for livestock in third countries —not third-world countries—are certainly not those that we would wish to see applied. Britain has an enormous amount to do to lead opinion in Europe on this matter. Our record is not blameless—of course it is not—but we have higher standards than anywhere else in Europe. Welfare organisations must work for change in the wider Europe, not simply concentrate their fire power and money-raising activities here. They should use their hard-won skills to influence the Governments of countries whose standards and cultural and attitudinal realities are not those of this country.

I conclude by reassuring hon. Members that we truly appreciate the concerns that have been expressed on behalf of those who are at the sharp end of the legislation—the hard-pressed British farmers. Statutory controls are truly an essential part of our programme for the protection of animal welfare. The requirements set out in many pages of the document, a number of which are new to our legislation, may appear onerous. But those who already respect and care for their animals—and that includes the greatest possible proportion of those in Britain concerned with livestock: the vast majority—have nothing to fear from them. I warmly commend them to the House.

6.44 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It was Ghandi who said that the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way in which it treats its animals. This is one of the few areas in which the European Union has something to learn from Britain about our standards of husbandry and the regulations that we have introduced. I welcome the regulations which consolidate a number of measures and bring about a few improvements in terms of stock densities and the keeping of animals.

That is not to say, however, that Britain should not constantly be looking at ways of improving the welfare of animals and the way in which we treat them, or that we should not constantly be pressing within the European Union for the sort of improvements that we know the

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

public, the Labour party and the Government wish to see. Many farmers are constantly striving for such improvements, and their work should be recognised.

Let me deal first with battery cages. The Minister explained with some clarity the complicated change in cage height to no less than 40 cm, which is compulsory for only 60 per cent. of the first 450 cu m. All cage heights after that can be as low as the producer wishes. That may be an improvement but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said, we are still talking about an area no bigger than a sheet of A4 paper.

Battery hens do not constitute a satisfactory method of egg production. All the research on battery cages confirms that. As early as 1985, a study by M. S. Dawkins entitled "Cage Height Preference and Use in Battery-Kept Hens" shows that 25 per cent. of hens' head movements take place at a height above 40 cm. By reducing that height, one is affecting the hens' behaviour. As the Minister will be aware, the Farm Animal Welfare Council, which does an excellent job and provides impartial and professional advice to the Government, has laid down five freedoms, one of which is the freedom to exhibit natural behaviour. Battery cages do not meet that criterion.

A recent study by Dr. Baxter, published in *The Veterinary Record*, concluded:

"The scientific evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that battery cages cause suffering in laying hens in at least seven different ways."

I shall not quote further. Suffice it to say that that is a carefully researched paper which will be endorsed by many people of an independent scientific mind.

I recognise the point made by the Minister and the Select Committee on Agriculture in its recent report that battery cages cannot be banned overnight. That must be done over a phased period, and the case for it argued through the European Union.

The Labour party recognises that it is of no advantage to animal welfare for Britain to ban battery cages if, because of the Single European Act, we cannot stop eggs that have been produced in the very same battery cages that we have banned flooding on to our market. We should like to see the phasing out of battery cages, but we recognise that that would have to be done in conjunction with the industry and the Council of Ministers so that similar measures can be introduced within the European Community.

There are many alternative methods of egg production —some of them extremely efficient and semi-automated —that give hens a chance to behave in more natural ways. As we move towards the ban, I hope that the Minister will consider various cage-enrichment measures, work on which has been undertaken in respect of many different animals in recent years. For hens, such measures can include perches, scratching pads and dust baths. We want more research and development in that regard.

I appreciate that one cannot ban battery systems overnight, and that improvements must be argued throughout Europe, but Sweden is phasing out battery cages and Switzerland has already banned them. Sweden may become a member of the European Union, so I hope that the Government will seek its support in persuading other member states to move in the right direction.

As to schedule 2, it is a matter of pride for Britain that veal crates have rightly been banned, but this country has a huge export trade in veal calves, which will be put in the same crates that are banned here. It is imperative that Britain argues in the Council of Ministers for similar standards to apply. We could do more than we do positively to reinforce our own producers in banning veal crates in the economics of veal production.

In this country, veal is produced much more humanely than on the continent, yet British veal is not marketed there as being humanely produced. No resources appear to be devoted to that through the Meat and Livestock Commission or Food from Britain, to give British producers some support and advantage to reward the high standards that they encourage.

We welcome paragraphs 6, 10, 11, 12 and 13 of schedule 2, which make it clear that there is no possibility of reintroducing restrictive crating of the kind banned in this country. My only concern is that schedule 2 still permits tethering—although it rightly specifies that the calf must be able to stand, turn around, lie down, rest and groom itself without hindrance. There appears to be some contradiction, so I would welcome the Minister's comments.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Does the hon. Gentleman have any estimate of the number of veal calves exported to the continent?

Mr. Morley: A figure of 450,000 has been suggested —an enormous trade, with all the welfare implications that go with it. I should like it stopped—I make no bones about that.

Schedule 3 relates to sow stalls and tethers, and I place on record my admiration for the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), who introduced the measure with all-party support. I am grateful, too, for the Government's support in announcing that sow stalls and tethers will be phased out by 1 January 1999.

Hon. Members may have received a brief from the British Pig Association, and I recognise its concern that the British pig industry will be disadvantaged because the European Union has announced that tethers will be banned. That will not occur until the year 2006. The Minister will be aware that the pig industry goes through particular cycles, and it is currently experiencing a difficult time.

There is evidence that some of Britain's main competitors are expanding pig production. Figures from the BPA suggest an increase in slaughtering of 54 per cent. in Denmark. In Spain, slaughtering has increased 24 per cent. and in France, 28 per cent. In the Netherlands, slaughtering has increased 97.3 per cent., while in the United Kingdom it has declined 5.1 per cent.

I was surprised to learn from a written answer that export refunds and private storage aid, which is available to all member states, totalled 2.6 million ecu for British producers in the provisional figures for 1993. Compare that with France, at 6.1 million ecu, and Germany, which received an incredible 33 million ecu. That shows that continental competitors are receiving a great deal of European funding. I hope that the Minister will explore ways of giving some support to the British pig industry in the move to alternative pig-rearing methods.

In my own constituency, which is a centre of the British pig industry, there has been a dramatic move towards field systems. A paper by Mike Varley at the department of animal physiology and nutrition of Leeds university estimated a 40 per cent. move towards field systems. The

same paper demonstrates some of the problems. The number of farms with pigs has declined dramatically, having almost halved in the past two years from 22,000 farms to 12,000—but the average herd size increased. That for sows has risen from 37 to 62.

Concentrated animal rearing brings problems that the regulations address, including tail docking and tooth clipping. I appreciate that the industry wants the right to dock tails and clip teeth for welfare reasons. If those practices are supported by veterinary opinion, there is no reason why they should not be allowed—but they must not be viewed as the norm. Such practices should be adopted on an individual basis, depending on welfare reasons.

One cause of tail chewing is intensive rearing systems. If stocking is reduced, so is tail chewing. Some field systems have reduced welfare problems—although I accept that different systems bring their own problems and challenges.

I hope that the Minister will reconsider the age limit on piglets for teeth clipping. Organisations such as Compassion in World Farming and the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals hold that clipping should be done within three days.

We welcome and endorse the prohibition on pig sweat boxes after 1 July 1995, and I am sure that the industry knows that that must come. There is also a regulation on pig weaning, which we also welcome. However, that largely endorses existing intensive practice, and there may be a case for reviewing the weaning age on the basis that the current limit in the regulations is on the low side.

I welcome the Minister's assurance that there will be no going back on the time scale for banning tethering and stalls, although I have some sympathy with the British pig industry's position. The industry is largely unsubsidised, competes commercially, receives little support and has great regard for animal welfare. That is certainly the impression that I receive when visiting pig farmers in my constituency. The BPA's brief takes a somewhat defeatist attitude to welfare marketing. The BPA considered that a premium price could not be obtained for pork produced from pigs bred in fields where high welfare standards applied, but I am not sure that I agree. I do not underestimate the difficulty of marketing food produced in such conditions, however: we need measures to make the system work effectively.

The association raised some points that I think the Minister should consider sympathetically. For instance, it called for research into alternative ways of rearing pigs more humanely. I know that a great deal of work has been done on the idea of farrowing crates designed to minimise the stress suffered by farrowing sows. The pig industry would like more support for training to establish a high standard of stock keeping—perhaps we should reconsider the qualifications involved—and the development of skills. I think that Government have a role in that regard, through the Agricultural Development Advisory Service and other organisations.

Then there is the question of capital investment. Those investing in agricultural machinery can claim tax relief on some 25 per cent. of the investment, but I understand that investors in new buildings in which to rear animals can claim only 3 per cent. Could our laws, or European Community laws, allow 25 per cent. relief on animal rearing systems intended to meet new welfare standards? The Minister may wish to discuss that with his Treasury colleagues. Such action might encourage those in the industry who have made the reasonable point that it is unfair for them to be improving welfare standards in isolation, while their competitors do nothing. Although that should not be used as an excuse for failing to aim for the highest possible welfare standards, consideration should be given to the pressure that is put on producers.

As I have said, Labour welcomes the regulations in general. However, we want improvements in training and clarification of enforcement issues, and some related issues need to be resolved in the European Union. The treaty of Rome, for instance, defines animals as agricultural products, which we see as one of the problems of the attitude of some southern European states in particular to animal welfare standards. We want the definition to be changed to "sentient animals", which would imply a recognition that animals feel, suffer and need to be kept properly.

This country does not compare favourably with others when it comes to marketing and adding value, especially when high welfare standards are involved. The aspiration of many farmers is simply to export live animals to the continent, where they are slaughtered and value is added at the slaughterhouses. That is not good enough. Given all the welfare problems of animal transport, the loss of jobs in our slaughter industry and the implications for our balance of trade, it makes no sense: we need more support for marketing and this country's high production standards. The Government could perform such a role through organisations such as Food From Britain and the Meat and Livestock Commission.

That will work, however, only if food is labelled properly to facilitate consumer choice. The Minister made a fair point when he spoke of the lobbying and campaigning power of animal welfare organisations. That power should also be directed at supermarkets and other retailers, which should be encouraged to sell British goods whose production has involved high standards and to label them in a way that enables consumers to opt for them. Clear labelling would greatly benefit British producers, because consumers would then be on their side, using their buying power to reward good producers and penalise those in other countries whose standards are lower. So far, we are making little progress in that regard.

I know that animal transport is not covered in the regulations, and I do not intend to go into detail; but it is important that we aim for high standards and try to minimise—or, preferably, eliminate—live transport for slaughter, especially where calves are concerned. There is no sense in it. Last week, at the Council of Ministers, the Government performed a dramatic U-turn, shifting from the so-called Greek compromise and backing the more progressive European member states. I hope that that attitude will continue, and that the Government will work alongside the countries—Germany, Holland and Denmark —which argue for higher welfare standards.

Above all, I hope that the Government will appreciate that all the improvements that we have discussed—which I suspect hon. Members on both sides of the House support —must be implemented, through Europe in many cases. That will require the support and co-operation of other member states. What this country must not do is continually isolate itself, thus forfeiting the help that we need to make such advances.

7.6 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I shall try not to be repetitious, although inevitably I shall repeat a little of what was said by the the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). I was slightly saddened by some of his closing remarks; until then, I intended to say that most of what he had said—as a prominent member of the all-party animal welfare group—was extremely generous and well informed. I associate myself with nearly all of it; I approved especially of what he said about the need for the best possible veterinary advice on matters such as the docking of pigs' tails.

My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned advertising. I should record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for the stand that she took in Luxembourg over the transport of live animals. It is a great pity that before her negotiations she was subjected to personal attacks in the press; I find that especially disturbing because, when my hon. Friend the Minister was generous enough to find time to see me with representatives of some animal welfare organsations, he made it abundantly clear that our right hon. Friend would negotiate. It is on that small issue that I quarrel with the hon. Gentleman.

There was no U-turn. My right hon. Friend went to Luxembourg to secure the best deal that she could in the circumstances. As it turned out, she was able to secure every modest improvement that was on the table; they were indeed modest—we acknowledge that. Moreover, she managed to secure the United Kingdom's unique privilege of maintaining minimum values in regard to the export of live horses, which is invaluable. Most important of all, she managed to keep the door open for negotiations to continue under the German presidency.

It is a great shame that the animal welfare organisations which have told me that they wrote privately to thank my right hon. Friend for the stand that she took did not have the courage to make those thanks public. I am afraid that, with some cynicism, I have to conclude that there are perhaps more fund-raising possibilities and more bequests are available from shock-horror advertising than from saying thank you.

I am chairman of the all-party animal welfare group which has been determined to campaign responsibly in the way that you taught us, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you chaired the group. We shall go on doing that and it is important that we do so. It is important that, when progress is made, it is recognised by us. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know only too well, however, that will not stop us fighting fiercely for future progress. However, we are grateful for the stand that my right hon. Friend the Minister took.

Like my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, I pay tribute to the Farm Animal Welfare Council for the enormous contribution that it has made and continues to make to farm animal welfare. I will remind the House of the council's freedoms. They include freedom from hunger, freedom from thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, freedom from injury and disease, freedom from fear, freedom from distress and—this is most important—freedom to express normal behaviour. While wishing to be generous, I must say that by those standards the regulations fail, in many cases lamentably.

Any improvement in the welfare of battery hens is welcome, but the changes are minimal. It is now widely accepted that the battery cage is no longer acceptable as a means of production. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe referred to Dr. Mike Baxter's article in *The Veterinary Record*. Dr. Baxter is a foremost authority on the subject. In an extremely erudite paper, he has set out clearly the differences between the life style of hens in battery cages and those in percheries.

The House must draw a clear distinction between what are known as free range chickens—subject to all the disease, discomfort and predators that are found, literally, free range and in the open—and chickens in a perchery. Those of us who have taken a keen interest in the issue generally accept that, although percheries may not be ideal, they are the best way forward.

The battery cage does not allow for normal behaviour. It does not allow for wing flapping, perching, nesting, preening and dust bathing. Battery cages lead to brittle bones and leg injuries. The spaces referred to in paragraph 1 of schedule 1 are inadequate for birds to perform their natural behaviour. Assuming that we have to maintain battery cages, for groups of four or more hens, a space allowance of at least 650 sq cm is essential. That would allow colony housing systems to be at least commercially competitive.

Paragraph 9 states:

"The flock or group of laying hens shall be inspected thoroughly at least once a day."

That is restated in the welfare codes of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. That is impossible in a battery system which may contain as many as 40,000 birds. I am told that to remove each bird in a system of that size would take three days. As a welfare requirement it is totally impractical.

I share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe about marketing and, particularly, labelling. I believe that many housewives, househusbands and shoppers who purchase eggs labelled "new laid" or "farm fresh" in pretty boxes with pictures of wide open fields with sunshine and grass genuinely believe that the product is from free range hens, whatever that might mean to the purchaser. In fact, that is not so at all: "fresh" means battery farm fresh—we must get that message across.

More can be done. I know that there has been some criticism of the standards that will be set, but I am pleased to learn that later this year the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is to launch its freedom food campaign. Under the RSPCA freedom food label, which will be marketed in at least two chains of supermarkets, it is designed to make it clear that the product will be of a high welfare standard—not so high as I or the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe would like, but infinitely better and more clearly marked than anything currently available to the housewife.

I hope that, when that campaign is launched the purchaser will use the power of the marketplace to begin to dictate high welfare standards. If the purchaser determines to buy only humanely produced products, the producers will quickly realise that it is in their interests to go down that road. That will happen not just in the United Kingdom, but—this is what we seriously wish to achieve—throughout the European Union.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said. Does he agree that

such campaigns would not be possible if the level of welfare for pigs, calves and hens was not already higher than in most of Europe? The campaigners therefore have a solid base from which to start.

Mr. Gale: I agree entirely that, by and large, the United Kingdom has higher farm animal welfare standards than anywhere else in Europe. That is something of which we can be justly proud, but it is not something about which we can be complacent.

I have indicated at some length my concern about battery hens. When eggs become available under the freedom food label they will certainly not come from battery cages. There is a great deal of progress still to be made, but my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) is right that the marketing campaign would not be possible were there not at least some supplies of well-produced food.

I am proud of the fact that we have banned the use of the veal crate in the United Kingdom. I know that there are those who feel that in doing so we have placed United Kingdom producers at a disadvantage to those throughout the European Union who still use veal crates. I do not believe that that is a reason for the United Kingdom not to take a lead. We should take pride in that. However, it would be foolish not to recognise that in one sense it has been a pyrrhic victory, as some 450,000 veal calves are exported each year to be put into veal crates and subject to even worse conditions on the continent than they would have been in the same veal crates in the United Kingdom. In fact, if veal calves are to be in crates at all, I would have preferred them to be in veal crates here where we can inspect and monitor them rather than on the continent.

On marketing, I was pleased and reassured to learn when I questioned the House of Commons Catering Department that the veal sold in this establishment is all United Kingdom produced. I wonder how many of my hon. Friends and hon. Members and how many people who may read or listen to this debate can put hand on heart and say that every time they go into an Italian restaurant or a butcher's shop they ask where the veal was produced. We know that frequently that veal will have been produced under conditions elsewhere in the European Union that we have said are unacceptable. We have the power to change that through the money in our pockets and the manner in which we spend it.

On advertising, I hope that we shall learn from some of the mistakes that have been made in recent weeks and that the animal welfare organisations which spend considerable sums on advertising will target some of that money and advertising on campaigns of education in the hope and expectation that the consumer will exercise the power of the bank balance and buy only humanely produced food.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) went into great detail about pigs, boars, sows and gilts, which form the bulk of the third schedule. I shall not repeat his argument, but I associate myself with all his remarks. It is particularly relevant that we should pay great attention to the best possible veterinary advice. There are genuine difficulties—it is not easy to strike a balance of welfare between sows and piglets while maintaining humane conditions. Matters of genuine debate and concern must be resolved. I still feel that perhaps the directive's provisions for space and bedding are less than adequate, but I am certain that we shall be able to make progress together on that.

I accept entirely that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food take these matters extremely seriously. As my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley said, the United Kingdom has the highest standards of any European Union country. We look to Ministers not only to promote our best standards throughout the European Union but to raise them, particularly in egg production.

I hope that we can make real progress on labelling so that those who want to buy humanely produced food can do so. If the housewife dictates the market, we shall raise farm animal welfare standards not only in the United Kingdom but much more quickly throughout the European Union.

7.21 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) not only because I agree with much of his speech but because I have the greatest respect for the work that he has done with the all-party group following your previous leadership, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary initiated the debate, for two reasons: first, because he now sees the industry as being peopled by "hard-pressed British farmers". Opposition Members and, no doubt, some Conservative Back Benchers, will repeat that phrase when we debate hill livestock compensatory allowances later in the year.

Secondly, his robust and realistic attitude on animal welfare is welcome to many hon. Members and, I am afraid that I must say, it is in contrast to the attitude of his Minister. On 24 February, I suggested to the Minister that she should

"address her mind particularly to the differences between the animal welfare standards that we seek to achieve in this country, which are on a different time scale to those that are being sought in other member states."

That comment was made with particular regard to the pig sector. She replied:

"On animal welfare, the hon. Gentleman is right that our producers do not have a level playing field. I make no apology for that. I am glad that this country has a strong and well-developed animal welfare lobby. We must live with that concern, which is so strongly felt by British people."

A few minutes later, in answer to a different question the Under-Secretary said:

"We remain anxious to ensure that an equal regime is in place throughout the continent."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1994; Vol. 238, c. 420-23.]

The core of tonight's debate is how to achieve that consistency. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will persuade his boss that that should be the core issue for us all.

It clearly would be absurd if hon. Members or, more generally, animal welfare organisations adopted a blinkered, little-Englander attitude that effectively was hypocritical, and that suggested that by just improving matters in this country we could persuade other countries in the European Union to follow our example. We are in a single market and it is absurd to imagine that that attitude will achieve any improvement.

As the hon. Member for Thanet, North said, it seems hypocritical for those who are concerned about the welfare of calves to spend so much time concerning themselves with conditions in this country that we do not use all possible leverage in the Council of Agriculture Ministers

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

to achieve improvements throughout the single market. Cleaning up our act in the United Kingdom would simply be wasted energy if we did not, at the same time, try to make a real start on the Augean stable on the continent.

That is why the timing of the regulations is so important. Are we considering the regulations because Ministers feel that there is no real prospect of making major advances across the whole Union? After all, they are six months late; under the directives, they were due on 1 January. Are we doing so because we expect that, under the German presidency which starts at midnight tonight, there will be less or more progress in future? If we are seeking to lead, we must have a view about the best way to ensure that the regulations are replicated as soon as possible throughout the Union.

Of course it is to be welcomed that we are seeking to implement the directives, but the key issue remains: will the way in which we tackle the subject secure any real advance throughout the Union? It is true that, under subsidiarity, which is possible in this area, some member states can adopt stricter regulations than others. So be it —somebody must lead—but to be so far ahead that we are not leading anyone else at all would be dangerous.

There would be no point in any British Government leading from the front and merely taking British farmers along with them into the wilderness. Unfortunately, a balance does not seem to be struck in the regulations and in the negotiations that take place, of course, behind closed doors in the Council of Ministers.

On a number of occasions, the National Farmers Union has rightly said, "If you impose on British farmers regulations that they are simply unable meet on grounds of cost, you will merely drive them out of the market and let in others with lower standards in other parts of Europe." Animals in Europe clearly would not benefit from such a development.

The hon. Member for Thanet, North advanced a convincing argument on battery cages. I very much endorse his comments. We must be careful that we do not proceed so slowly by evolution—by tweaking here and tweaking there—that we end up with a cost that has no real benefit. Constantly amending and altering regulations may in the long term be more costly to the sector than the complete removal of battery cages according to a reasonable time scale. The most dangerous situation is that our industry is constantly having to adjust slightly at great cost, while other countries either lag right behind or are able to make a transformation in one step.

I very much endorse what the hon. Member for Thanet, North said about the total unrealistic attitude to inspection in schedule 1. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has made a good case on the matter and I hope that we shall not mislead animal welfare campaigners or, indeed, the poultry industry by suggesting that the schedule somehow is adequate.

The schedule 2 regulations make it clear that the objective should be to ensure that calves should be able to hear, smell and see other calves, but the way in which the regulations spell that out will not implement that objective. Farmers have a right to be concerned that the cost to them has been anticipated and that the Government are prepared to put something in place to ensure that they are not out of pocket as a result.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to know why no effective action is being taken to prevent the export of 450,000 calves to systems that are clearly regarded by hon. Members and many others in the country as being inhumane. I endorse the comments that have been made by many hon. Members about labelling, but that is not sufficient to tackle the present problem. Clearly, United Kingdom regulations alone are meaningless if we seek such restrictions without at the same time tackling the conditions in which the calves will be treated when they reach a continental rearing system.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) said that he would rather see calves in veal crates in this country than in veal crates in Holland, because at least here we could be happier that they were being properly monitored. However, if I have understood the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) correctly, he is saying that we should have ways of stopping the 450,000 calves being exported to Holland and elsewhere, primarily in veal crates. How could one do that within the single market, other than by persuading the whole Community to give up crates? The hon. Gentleman seemed to accept that we should work towards giving up crates throughout the Community, but he also seemed to suggest that there was something that we could do on our own to stop the practice.

Mr. Tyler: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman misunderstood me. I agree that that has to be done within the framework of the single market and the European Union mechanisms. I was about to say—I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me—that it does not seem clever to me to take unilateral action and ban the export of calves, if by doing so we simply encourage livestock producers and those who are responsible for some of the conditions that we regard as inhumane in the other continental countries to expand their production. In present circumstances, if we were suddenly to ban the export of all livestock, including calves, the Germans would be laughing all the way to the bank. What would that achieve for the welfare of calves or for the livestock producers of this country?

Secondly, I do not believe that the regulations go far enough to ensure that calves are provided with clean and dry bedding. That seems a basic essential, and one that all those concerned with the issue have actively drawn to the Minister's attention. Nobody in the livestock sector feels that compliance would be too onerous.

Thirdly, I believe that the RSPCA's view that calves need to be fed at least twice a day for the first two weeks of their lives would be accepted by most farmers and livestock producers. They would regard it as sensible husbandry. There would be great support for that. The regulations insist only on feeding once a day, and I hope that the Minister will be able to satisfy us that that is really sufficient, and is not merely the barest minimum necessary to ensure freedom from hunger.

Much has already been said about pigs, and I do not wish to detain the House unnecessarily. We must recognise that there is a huge problem here and, as I have said to the Minister before, the pig sector, which has been going through a tough time throughout the United Kingdom, bitterly resents the fact that they are working not only to a different timetable but in a different direction altogether from their competitors in other member states. I hope that

when the Minister replies he will be able to assure us that, following the change of presidency, he will press the new holder to take a much more active role to examine ways in which the other member states can come closer to our time scale.

With farrowing crates and weaning, there is a genuine dilemma. Those who know a little about the subject—I confess that I do not know a great deal, although my retirement job could be to keep pigs—tell me that it is a satisfying occupation, as a former Prime Minister would be the first to agree. At farrowing and at weaning there is a genuine welfare dilemma between the welfare of the sow and that of the piglets. I am not sure whether the regulations take that fully into account. They certainly do not spell it out, and I know that many farmers would agree with the concerns expressed on the subject.

As for tooth clipping, we can all argue about whether it should be done at three, five or seven days or older, but the critical question is: who is to do it? It should be someone who is competent and has the necessary experience, expertise and training. That raises a general problem not fully addressed by the regulations. I believe that all people who handle livestock should have access to a recognised system of training, testing and qualification. That should be the basic essential, and it would meet a lot of the public concern.

As the hon. Member for Thanet, North said, tributes have been paid to the Farm Animal Welfare Council and its five basic freedoms; yet we must admit that the regulations do not provide those five basic freedoms—nor, of course, do the current objectives of EC directives or of the discussions taking place in the Council of Ministers. We are a long way off.

It would be deplorable if in any way the passage of the regulations meant that Ministers were prepared to relax their efforts in the EU, and were prepared to say to their colleagues in other member states and in the states seeking to join the Union that the situation is now less urgent; less of a priority. The regulations represent a short step in the right direction, but there is a great deal still to be done.

The critical issue is surely the fact that we cannot expect producers in a single market to adopt higher and higher welfare standards at higher and higher cost to themselves, and potentially to their customers, if they cannot see real improvements among their competitor countries as well —that includes third countries outside the EU that are increasing their exports into the Community.

As has often been said recently, both by the Commissioners and by Ministers, they are trying to open up markets to other producers, especially producers from the former communist countries of eastern Europe. But in those countries welfare standards, like environmental standards, are way below ours. It would be unreasonable to raise that iron curtain at the risk of doing huge damage to our livestock producers.

I believe that the five freedoms suggested by the FAWC are important, and that we should keep them in mind. But I seriously question whether the role of the FAWC can be maintained if we pay lip service to those objectives yet go such a short way along the road towards achieving them. Perhaps the time has come to have an independent animal welfare commission, which many organisations outside the House, and perhaps hon. Members too, would feel had more credibility, and which would be able to speak out publicly when it felt that the Minister or the EU was not making sufficient progress towards achieving the five freedoms.

7.36 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Before I say what I have to say, I must first declare an interest in the pig industry.

I agree with much of what has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House, but I take issue with practically all of them when they say that standards will be changed by the various pressures that they describe. They have expressed many pious hopes, but I would like to illustrate my point with an example.

If we asked the chairman of one of the big retailers his view on animal welfare, we would get an answer that would please us. That is not unexpected, but we must bear in mind the fact that it is not the chairman of the big retailing company who actually buys the meat. The person who buys the meat is the meat buyer, who takes his instructions from a manager, who in turn has a clear directive from the board of directors of his company to make a profit. So, notwithstanding all the pious hopes expressed tonight, I have to remind the House that the commercial reality is that, with most of what is bought and sold—not only meat and meat products but other products freely bought and sold in the market—price is a very important consideration.

I want to draw the attention of the House to the parlous state of the pig industry. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) gave us the figures for pig production in the European Union. He explained how our production has fallen by 5 per cent. over 20 years, while that of our neighbours in Holland has increased by almost 100 per cent. in the same time.

I draw the House's attention to some other statistics. The first interesting statistic is the index of producer prices for agricultural products in the United Kingdom from 1985 to 1993, which starts in 1985 with a producer index of 100. For pigs, the index had risen by 1993 to only 101.2—in other words, the figure had scarcely changed for eight years. There can be scarcely any other product bought and sold in the marketplace today for which there has not been a substantial increase in price, or certainly an appreciation in price far greater than that experienced in the pig industry.

I draw to my hon. Friend the Minister's attention the fact that the pig industry is technically very efficient compared with the industries in Denmark, France and the Netherlands. The number of pigs sold per sow per year is higher in this country than in the others. Our food conversion ratio is better and our labour costs are better. On so many counts, our industry is far more efficient than that of our competitors.

We have a food and drink trade deficit of about £6 billion per annum; we still import 50 per cent. of our bacon; and, as anybody interested in agricultural matters knows, we have a surplus of home-grown cereals. Those three facts are three compelling reasons for helping rather than hindering the British pig industry. If the regulations are enforced unilaterally, as seems likely, we shall almost certainly see the increased importation of pork and bacon and a bigger surplus of home-grown cereals. I point out that those cereals are likely to be lower in value than previously and we shall see a larger trade gap.

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

My hon. Friend the Minister, who follows these matters closely, will agree that there will also be a knock-on effect on the abattoir sector where there has been massive capital expenditure to comply with the latest EC regulations. That in turn has created serious overcapacity, which is the inevitable consequence of modernisation. Nobody modernises and reduces capacity. With the installation of more sophisticated machinery and systems, capacity is increased. Yet all the time, the abattoir industry suffers from a shortage of livestock. That is a feature of the industry that the regulations will accentuate.

Pig farmers are unlikely to upgrade when they are already losing money. The additional costs under the regulations are estimated to be between £2.70 and £3 per pig. As several hon. Members have already pointed out, our competitor nations are not following suit.

It may be of some interest to know that last week, I visited the largest pig abattoir in Europe. Its throughput is almost double that of any abattoir in this country. One of the major secrets of its success is that it has guaranteed throughput. The abattoir is geared up to and bears the overheads for the slaughter and processing of 50,000 pigs per week. Unless the abattoir processes that number, the economics of running it does not stack up. The Danes are in the happy position of knowing that each and every week roughly 50,000 pigs will go through the abattoir. No British abattoir can make that assumption, and that creates a huge problem for the industry.

The regulations will do nothing to stop the rush of public companies leaving the slaughter industry. The end result will be serious for the domestic pig industry and for the domestic meat industry. The end result will be that there will be no pig processors with the financial muscle to match their continental competitors.

The pig industry has seldom, if ever, asked for help. It has stood on its own feet. There has been no subsidy. I invite the House and my hon. Friend to compare that with the position in other European Union countries where there is state aid, as we know. Our pig industry has fought its own battles. I draw the House's attention to the fact that it has a pre-eminent position in the world in terms of its breeding and husbandry knowledge and technology. The pig industry has solved its own problems. I need refer my hon. Friend only to the action taken by the pig industry, at its own expense, to eradicate Aujesky's disease. The pig industry is content to go on standing on its own feet, fighting its own battles and solving its own problems.

What the industry does not need and what it cannot afford is to be made to carry an unfair handicap. The regulations are an unfair handicap because they are being implemented in this country six or seven years before implementation in other countries of the European Union.

The Minister knows my views on welfare. The role of Government and the role of politicians in this area is, without doubt, to strike a balance between what is demanded by the welfare lobby and the commercial realities of the industry. If the welfare lobby had its way entirely, there would be few home-produced eggs and scarcely any home-produced veal, and practically every last slice of bacon would be imported. In those circumstances, where would all those foods come from? The answer, which is a plain as a pikestaff, is that they would be imported from countries where the high standards of welfare that we want in this country, but which we are introducing prematurely, simply do not exist.

I urge the Minister to consider the practical benefits of a thriving pig sector in British agriculture: supplying a market in which the United Kingdom is not self-sufficient, consuming cereals for which there is no other demand, creating year-round permanent employment, sustaining a domestic abattoir industry and maintaining the United Kingdom's pre-eminent position as a leading exporter of breeding stock.

I urge my hon. Friend to give the House an assurance that the regulations will not be implemented unless and until the rest of the European Union does the same. I believe that failure to give that assurance means that the Minister will carry a heavy responsibility, the consequences of which will be with us for many a year to come. I ask my hon. Friend to be brave and resolute in defence of a vital British industry and to consider the requests and the pleas that have been made, not only by the British Pig Association, but by the National Farmers Union and other bodies representing the british farming industry.

7.47 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) made an excellent speech and I pay tribute to him. Labour is now radical on animal welfare issues.

Incredible and unimaginable cruelty is associated with intensive farming methods—none more so than with battery cages. I was disappointed that the Minister effectively said that battery cages would never be abolished. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe said that, under Labour, they would be phased out and that we would try to take Europe with us on that issue.

The A-frame cages are appalling; they are the size of a piece of A4 paper. There is no space for the birds to spread their wings and there is chronic overcrowding. The birds cannot exhibit natural behaviour and they suffer injuries and ill health, as has been said. Salmonella, chicken cancer and herpes-related diseases spread as a result of the overcrowding. In those intensive conditions, there is a prospect of those diseases spreading rapidly to other birds, which would also affect human health. There are alternatives to that process, so battery cages should be phased out over a clear time scale.

This is not the time to talk about the transport of live animals, but those freedoms to which the Farm Animal Welfare Council referred—freedom from hunger and thirst and from distress, and the freedom to behave normally —apply to transportation as they do to battery hens and to other intensively farmed animals. We are moving further away from those freedoms and actions against cruelty to appease Europe's peasant farmers and, indeed, the rich boys in the farming industry.

On issue after issue, especially the transport of live animals, we have given up our animal welfare provisions and got virtually nothing in return. The gap is exceptionally wide. On transport, for example, we had a limit of 12 hours before animals were fed, rested and watered. It should be eight hours, as the welfare organisations, such as the RSPCA, suggested. In Europe, the limit is 24 hours and the compromise, apparently, is 22

hours. Europe continues to use battery cages, and, as has been said, will export the produce. There has been no significant progress in Europe to get rid of battery cages.

It is right that we have a veal crate ban and that is a credit to the Government, but the countries in the European Union still use them and there will be pressure on us to lift that ban—commercial pressure at least. We do not transport live horses for slaughter, but, again, there will be enormous European and commercial pressure for that to come about. We are not carrying Europe with us.

The Government refuse to use any muscle on the issues that matter, yet the European Community directives are unacceptable. We should be using the veto on many of the associated issues until an agreement which has animal welfare as a high priority is hammered out. That is the only way in which the United Kingdom can take the lead.

The Government should commit themselves to the Amendola report, which redefines animals as sentient beings and not as agricultural products. I urge the Minister to make that commitment.

7.51 pm

Mr. Soames: I shall try to deal properly with the points raised. This has been a well-informed debate in which hon. Members have spoken not only with knowledge, but with passion.

I noted the views of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on battery cages. The Government do not consider that a ban at this stage would be appropriate, for reasons which the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well. It is also fair to say that I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises, although sometimes I am a little concerned about what he knows and what he does not know about the agricultural world—I am sure that he knows—that all systems of egg production carry some welfare risk. It is extremely difficult to discriminate between one system and another.

We have a good programme of research in that area and we are seeking, and we shall continue to seek, changes. Since the hon. Gentleman asked, I especially emphasise the nature of the change that we want. For battery cage systems, we are seeking an increased area per bird. We are also seeking environmental enrichment of cages by, for example, including perches and scratching bars, which is one of the points rightly made by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale). We also expect the proposals to take account of the welfare needs of those laying hens which are not kept in battery cages.

By and large, the hon. Gentleman made a reasoned, sensible and well-informed speech, until the end of his remarks, and I shall deal with that matter in a minute.

Taxation is, of course, a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, but I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's views are drawn to his attention. I do not expect that the hon. Gentleman knows, but it is accepted that any non-therapeutic procedure, such as tooth-clipping and tail-docking of piglets, always gives cause for concern. Anyone who deals with pigs will know that it is not always possible to limit the effects of aggression by other means.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about marketing. Food For Britain is an extremely important and successful operation dedicated to exporting British agricultural goods abroad. It is doing a very good job. My right hon. Friend the Minister has made marketing the absolute top priority for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I also note the further points that the hon. Gentleman made on that matter.

The only truly fatuous part of the hon. Member's speech was about animal transport. It is a matter of regret that my meeting with the welfare lobbies led to what is, fundamentally, a major breakdown in trust between them and my Department. For instance, I do not think that I shall be able to take the Compassion in World Farming organisation as being a credible witness on any of those matters again in the future.

The picture that the hon. Gentleman portrayed of my right hon. Friend's position at the meeting in Luxembourg was quite ridiculous. My right hon. Friend negotiated there, she saw the situation move in our direction, and she rightly took the opportunity to move along those lines. It is quite plain that we have now made progress and that there will be further progress in future.

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Mr. Soames: No, I shall not give way.

Let me now deal with the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North. Along with other hon. Members, I wish to pay tribute to his work as chairman of the all-party welfare group, because his comments were measured, humane and sensible, but extremely robust. He is also totally straight, and we know where we are with him.

On the transport of animals, my hon. Friend portrayed the case exactly as it happened. The tribute that he paid to my right hon. Friend the Minister is entirely justified. Of course, I accept that my hon. Friend, with his strong views, and with the dedicated and principled stand that he takes, will not be fully satisfied by the regulations. I listened carefully and made a note of what he said, and I especially note his views on battery hens.

I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the RSPCA and its food labelling initiative. However, on the general point of labelling, marketing is, essentially, a matter for the industry. It is not a principle of general United Kingdom food labelling law that information about methods of rearing or the type of animals should be required on food labels. However, voluntary indications of rearing methods are permitted, subject to the general provision—the point made by hon. Friend—of the Food Safety Act 1990, which prohibits the use of false or misleading descriptions of foods.

I share my hon. Friend's concern about some of those matters. I give him my word, at this Dispatch Box, that he may be reassured that we shall promote the very best standards of this country throughout the European Community, and that is the declared aim and intention of my right hon. Friend the Minister and of all of us who are involved in animal welfare matters.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) talked about hypocrisy. Whenever Liberal Democrats start talking about hypocrisy, I am reminded of the man who talked of his honour, but the more he talked of his honour, the faster we started counting the spoons.

There is not a hair's breadth between my right hon. Friend the Minister and myself on the matters before us. She has been doing precisely what every hon. Member in the House would want her to do—proceeding in a robust, but sensible and pragmatic manner and trying to make realistic achievements in a very difficult forum. I note the

[Mr. Soames]

points that the hon. Gentleman made about schedule 1, about calves' bedding and feeding practices and I shall draw them to the attention of my hon. Friends who are responsible for those matters.

The hon. Gentleman also asked what other welfare measures we are producing. We are proud of our presently high standards, but, of course, it would be complacent to suggest that they are not capable of further improvement. We have undertaken—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will be pleased—not to introduce any new measures on a unilateral basis if that would undermine the competitive position of UK producers. As a member of the European Union, we see the way forward as being through pan-European legislation and our aim is to see our own high standards accepted and adopted by our European partners.

In a bit of unbelievable waffle, the hon. Member for North Cornwall talked about the need for an independent commission on animal welfare. There already is one: it is called the Farm Animal Welfare Council. It is an independent body made up of members representing many areas of interest. It has total freedom to report, to recommend and to publish all that it does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow made an important speech. I accept and understand his concerns, and those of the farmers whose interests he spoke about today. However, I do not accept that high standards of welfare are inimical to profit. Indeed, at the Norfolk show today, I was shown by a major supermarket some excellent welfare-friendly pork which is achieving remarkable results in its stores.

I note my hon. Friend's views about the pig industry and I endorse them. It is a splendid operation and we value it. My hon. Friend is right to mention the difficulties in the abattoir sector. I note all the points that he made, and I can assure him that we will bear them in mind.

I urge the House to adopt these important regulations which will be of great benefit to animal welfare in this country. I thank hon. Members for taking part in such an interesting and well-informed debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 14th June, be approved.

Services for Members

[Relevant document: Part of the Minutes of Proceedings of the Finance and Services Committee on 21st June (House of Commons Paper No. 518-i).]

8 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I beg to move,

That this House approves the First Report from the Information Committee, on The Provision of a Parliamentary Data and Video Network (House of Commons Paper No. 237), and the First Report from the Committee of Session 1992-93, on The Provision of Members' Information Technology Equipment, Software and Services (House of Commons Paper No. 737).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this it will be convenient to debate the following motion:

That this House takes note of the recommendation contained in the First Report of the Broadcasting Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 323 of Session 1991-92, that a clean television feed of proceedings in the Chamber should be made available to Members in their Parliamentary offices on completion of the Parliamentary Data and Video Network; but endorses the Resolution of the Broadcasting Committee of 27th June, set out in the Minutes of Proceedings of the Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 533-i, that, in view of the information now available about the likely timetable for installing the network, work should be undertaken separately from the network with a view to supplying a clean feed to Members with offices in the Parliamentary outbuildings from the beginning of the 1994-95 Session, and thereafter as it becomes technically feasible in each outbuilding, with the aim of completing the process by the end of the Summer Recess of 1995, and that the House authorities should examine the scope for accelerating the provision of a similar facility to Members with offices in the Palace of Westminster, as part of the programme for establishing the network.

Mr. Bennett: I shall start by conveying to the House the apologies of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) who is not here. I think that he is lying flat on his back. He has had considerable trouble with his back over the past few months, and has had treatment for it—I am not sure whether he had an operation yesterday. I am sure that the whole House will want to wish him well.

We should be especially grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Many hon. Members, having spent two years working away to prepare a report for the House, would have liked to have their moment of glory and present it to the House. It would have been easy for the hon. Gentleman to say that we should put off the debate for a week or two, in which case he might well have been here to move the motion himself. However, he was especially keen that the report be approved as soon as possible, and that is why he asked me if I was prepared to move it on his behalf.

In moving the motion, I thank the specialist advisers to the Information Committee, Professor Bob Hynds and Mr. Philip Virgo, the Clerk of the Committee, and a large number of officers of the House who provided information and helped us a great deal in preparing the report. I also thank Richard Morgan, the computer officer, other members of the Information Committee and the user group that was set up, whose members provided us with a great deal of valuable information on the way in which networks work. In that regard, I thank especially Mrs. Bray and Mr. Crum-Ewing, representing the Westminster branch of the Transport and General Workers Union and the Secretaries and Assistants Council.

When I first came to the House some 20 years ago, I was a little surprised in some ways to find that there were still old scratchy pens in the Lobby and the Library, and there

was still an ink monitor. I notice that the ink monitors still work their way through the Lobbies occasionally; the Library has moved on from scratchy pens to biros, although sometimes they disappear more quickly than the scratchy pens.

That was about the only concession to modern technology within the building at that stage. One rarely found any computer screens. Even 10 years ago, it was not easy to find computer screens. However, if one now goes down through the Library, almost every desk has a computer on it; in many of the Departments of the House, computers are fairly commonplace, and the Departments are making excellent use of them.

Some hon. Members will have noticed the big improvement in *Hansard* recently. It used to be frustrating that *Hansard* finished reporting the day's proceedings soon after 10 pm. On many nights now, it is able to report almost to midnight, although the House has not been sitting until that time lately. It is fairly rare for there to be a carry-over from one day to the next in *Hansard*. That is a tribute to both the people who work in Hansard and the way in which they use the new technology.

Many of the Select Committee reports are now produced by the use of computers. That has cut down the repetitive typing work involved. We can see computers in the Serjeant at Arms' Department and in almost every other Department.

I suppose that the biggest improvement is the number of computers on the desks of hon. Members and their secretaries and researchers. Ten years ago, if we heard hon. Members, researchers or secretaries talking about computers, it was usually with a measure of fear and trepidation—they were wondering whether they could possibly give them a go. Nowadays, they are much more likely to be talking about which programme they should be using and how to get the best out of the programme to improve their efficiency. The House has accepted personal computers.

What we are talking about today is how to get the benefit of all those developments to help hon. Members' with their constituency work and to enable them to be properly informed so that they are better able to scrutinise the Executive—how we can bring it all together and get the full benefit of it. It is clear that that can be achieved only with a network.

We have now had an experiment. It took the House of Commons a long time to agree to an experiment, but just before the 1992 election it was agreed that there would be one. We have now done that experiment and the report on it is before the House tonight. Of course, there were some problems with the experiment—I would not claim that everything went perfectly—but it was extremely useful. Having looked at the report, the House has the opportunity to see the potential of the network.

The first thing that we must accept is that setting up the network will be expensive. There were a lot of fears in the Committee as to how much it would cost. The report makes it clear that it is difficult to come up with the precise cost for the network because of all the other implications, such as the fact that this is a historic building. I do not think that we have to worry too much about what happened 100 years ago; we must worry more about what happened 20 years ago in terms of the problems that arose when asbestos was found, and the fact that it was sealed up.

Much of the cost of putting in the network simply relates to putting the building into a good state of repair and ensuring that we have the best facilities in terms of fire warnings, the telephone network and so on. I do not think, therefore, that hon. Members should be too worried about the cost. I have also noticed that as regards computers—they represent one of the few areas in which this has been happening—there has been a tendency recently for costs to come down rather than go up. I believe that the problem of cost can be overcome. I am delighted that the Finance and Services Committee supports the Committee's recommendations and that in the end the Government will not veto the expenditure.

The other worry from the Committee's point of view was the time scale. There are many worries about that. In many ways, it hinges on the attitude of hon. Members. Looking around the Chamber, I suspect that most hon. Members who are here tonight are probably sympathetic to the idea and would be happy to be moved out of their office for a weekend, or perhaps even longer, to facilitate the introduction of the network. Other hon. Members—probably those who are not present tonight—are less sympathetic to such moves.

The time scale comes down to the extent to which hon. Members, their secretaries and researchers are prepared to put up with disruption while the cabling work is carried out. I hope that there will be fairly rapid movement. I hope that people will be so keen to be on the network that they will be prepared to put up with more disruption. However, that is clearly a question of balance.

So far, I have talked about the first report—that dealing with the provision of a parliamentary data and video network. We are also considering the report from the last Session which dealt with the more difficult issue of the original recommendation of the top salaries review: instead of hon. Members' having an allowance to buy the computer equipment they needed, the House should provide them with it. The Committee again took fairly detailed evidence and, in the end, came up with a compromise. The Committee felt that it would be better to leave it to Members to decide at their individual discretion where to make their purchases, but that the House should offer a general recommendation. That is a sensible compromise.

When I first became involved with computers, I was very worried about them, but I was persuaded that using an Apple Mac machine would be easy. I do not think that I was actually told that any idiot could find his way around it, but that is what was implied, and it has given me some computer literacy.

It would be unfair on new Members coming into the House and to people coming to work in the House who had just started to master a particular computer system if they were then told that they had to standardise on a particular system which was provided by the House. When members of the Select Committee were in Canada taking evidence, we got the impression from some Canadian Members of Parliament that the fact that their House prescribed particular pieces of equipment and computer programs was rather restrictive.

I could speak at length about the reports, but I am conscious that we have a very limited time. As the mover of the motion, I shall be able, with the leave of the House, to respond to points raised during the debate. I shall finish with just one comment about motion No. 5, which deals with the live feed. That is tied in with the other motion because, unless we get the network, it will be very difficult to ensure that the live feed is available.

[Mr. Bennett]

Some people have said that, if hon. Members can watch proceedings in the Chamber in their rooms, they will not bother to come to the Chamber. It is interesting to note that Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 3 o'clock to half-past 3, the two occasions during the week on which Members can do just that—sit in their rooms, put on BBC2 and watch the proceedings—are when the Chamber is actually at its most crowded; people do take the trouble to come.

I find it odd that if I am able to get home early to the Barbican, I can, if I want, watch what is going on in the Chamber because it is on the network there, but I cannot watch it in my office in the House. I realise that it can be argued that it would be fairer if everyone were able to have that facility. I certainly hope that the House will approve both motions tonight.

8.13 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): May I first take the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for his generous remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller)? The remarks were well deserved, given the amount of work that my hon. Friend put into the report. I am sure that he, like me, is grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kindness.

My main role in the debate is simply as Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee and as a member of the Finance and Services Committee in relation to the motion standing in my name on the Order Paper concerning what the hon. Gentleman just referred to—the provision in Members' offices of what is known as the clean feed of television pictures from the Chamber.

Let me take the opportunity to pay tribute to the helpful work, in the Broadcasting Committee's consideration of matters, of the Clerk to the Committee, David Doig; of the present supervisor of parliamentary broadcasting, Margaret Douglas; of her predecessor, John Grist and of our other adviser, Bob Longman, in enabling us to consider these matters.

Before I set out as briefly as I can the complicated background to the motion, I should just like to note—perhaps more in my role as Leader of the House—that this is the first debate following the creation of the new structure of domestic Committees after the recommendations in the House of Commons services report, known as the Ibbs report, with the House's assumption of financial control for its own accommodation and works.

The new service—in this case the parliamentary data and video network—is proposed by the relevant domestic Committee. The views of the Finance and Services Committee are available and the House is invited to give a general endorsement, which I hope will happen later this evening. Thereafter, the details of the implementation are a matter for decision by the Finance and Services Committee and the Commission.

I should perhaps say to the House that my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee, hopes to be able to come to the House tonight in time to contribute to the debate, but he has been delayed on his way here. If he is not able to speak, I may—with the leave of the House and as long as I do not shut out other speakers—speak later on behalf of the Committee.

Since the televising of the House's proceedings was approved on a permanent basis three years ago, there has been steady pressure from different parts of the House for Members to be able to follow events in the Chamber from their parliamentary offices. Even though the convenience of having the facility is obvious, it is fair to say that hitherto not all Members have favoured such a development. The division of opinion in the House was reflected in the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House, as it was then known, when it first considered the issue in July 1990.

While acknowledging the benefits that access to the clean feed would bring to Members—particularly those in the parliamentary outbuildings—the Committee rejected the idea on three main grounds. These were: the possible adverse effect on attendance in the Chamber; the possible element of intrusiveness in offices shared by more than one Member or in offices where there was only a thin party wall; and the cost of the necessary wiring and sets.

Two years later, what is now the Broadcasting Committee—which I now chair—reconsidered the subject following further representations from Members and decided that the position taken by its predecessor was no longer tenable. There were two main reasons for that change of heart. The first was that the availability to cable subscribers of the parliamentary channel's continuous coverage had brought home to many Members the existence of a facility which others could have, but to which they were denied access in their offices in the House. The second related to technological developments within the House, notably the proposed installation of the parliamentary data and video network which we are debating tonight.

As the Committee put it,

"we believe that the deliberate exclusion from the proposed . . . network of the live pictures of the House's own proceedings would strike increasing numbers of Members as increasingly odd".

The Committee was undoubtedly right in that.

The Committee attached one important condition to its recommendation that the clean feed be included in the package of services. That was that, in order to avoid creating different classes of Members, the clean feed should not be available to any Members in any part of the estate until it was available to all Members in all parts of the estate.

That is where matters stood until the publication of the recent report of the Information Committee, to which the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish spoke just now. On the basis of more up-to-date evidence than was available to the Broadcasting Committee in 1992, the Information Committee invited the Broadcasting Committee to reconsider its recommendation on the clean feed on the grounds that the likely time scale for completing the installation of the PDVN was now significantly longer—up to seven years—than was the case when the Broadcasting Committee first discussed the matter.

In agreeing to the Information Committee's suggestion to reconsider, the Broadcasting Committee recognised two main areas of concern. One was the overall timetable for the installation of the PDVN in which the clean feed was to be included, and the other was the position of Members in outbuildings. Those in offices in Norman Shaw north

and south were seen as being at a particular disadvantage, as compared with colleagues both in the House and in other outbuildings with more modern facilities.

The Broadcasting Committee therefore asked the Director of Works to look at the feasibility of adopting a different approach which would achieve an accelerated provision of the clean feed to all parliamentary outbuildings. I would like to express my thanks to the Director of Works for the prompt way in which he has responded to the Committee's request and come forward with new proposals.

The proposals, if implemented, would mean that Members in all the outbuildings would have access to the clean feed by the end of the summer recess of 1995. The cabling work to achieve that would be carried out separately and in advance of the installation of the PDVN as a whole. But as a significant proportion of the cabling and ducting work can later be used in connection with the PDVN, the additional unavoidable cost of an accelerated approach to the clean feed is estimated to be very small in relation to the project as a whole—£60,000 to £70,000. I hope that the House will agree that that is a relatively modest sum for a worthwhile improvement in the services available to Members.

The detailed costings will, of course, have to be considered by the Finance and Services Committee and the House of Commons Commission, which Madam Speaker chairs. As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned, I should point out to the House that some hon. Members may face some disturbance twice—once while the work on the clean feed is carried out and then again when the full network is installed. It is hoped that that disturbance can be kept to a minimum by concentrating work as far as possible during recesses—in particular, the summer recess.

The Broadcasting Committee accepted the revised proposals as a sensible compromise, which meets the legitimate concerns of Members with offices in the parliamentary outbuildings. In some cases—for example, No. 1 Parliament street and No. 7 Millbank—the necessary wiring is already in place and little or no additional work is needed. The Committee therefore also decided that it would be sensible if the feed were made available in each outbuilding as it became technically feasible, starting from the beginning of the next Session, 1994-95. That does not, however, affect the overall target date of the end of the 1995 summer recess for the completion of the process outside the main building. In effect, we are talking about a project to make the clean feed available to all the outbuildings in the course of the next Session of Parliament.

For Members in the main building, for whom access to the Chamber is much more convenient, the Committee has expressed the hope that the timetable for installing the PDVN, and with it the clean feed, can be speeded up. The Director of Works is already in the process of reviewing this matter, although I obviously cannot predict or pre-empt the outcome.

Those conclusions of the Broadcasting Select Committee are embodied in a resolution contained in the extract from the Committee's minutes of proceedings, which have been laid before the House. As the proposal from the Committee affects the convenience of individual Members and has possible implications for the way the House works, it is clearly right that any decision in principle should be taken by the House as a whole. It is for the House to decide where the balance of advantage lies.

For my part, speaking in my capacity as Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee, I hope that the House will approve the motion standing in my name, as well as the other motion. At the same time, I should like to express my personal hope that the House will accept the propositions put before it by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish.

8.22 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for introducing this important debate. In common with him, I support all three resolutions.

Before I proceed to discuss the matters of substance, I should like to identify the parliamentary Opposition with the remarks made by my hon. Friend and by the Leader of the House about the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). We wish him a speedy recovery and we regret that he cannot be here tonight.

I should also like to thank the Leader of the House for usefully sketching in the background to the debate and, in particular, explaining the background to the Broadcasting Select Committee resolution which is before the House for consideration.

The House has been asked to express a view on a range of issues and our debate is helpfully informed by reports from the Information Select Committee and the Broadcasting Select Committee. We also have before us the resolution from the Broadcasting Select Committee, to which I just referred. Less excitingly for those in favour of reform, or any progress, we have before us the minutes of the Finance and Services Select Committee.

It seems perfectly clear that the majority of Members wish to retain freedom of decision-making in the provision of office equipment. That, frankly, does not surprise me. There are a range of reasons for that. The obvious ones are that different Members prioritise their work in different ways; different constituencies require different priorities from their Members of Parliament and some Members have support from other sources, whether commercial, through their own professional lives, or perhaps even from their own constituency parties, which are able to provide office equipment and other support that other parties and other constituencies cannot provide.

On page 7 of the Information Select Committee report, the consultants who recommended central provision of equipment claim that Members of Parliament wish to move from the 651 "tiny businesses" model towards a company model. That is highly unlikely to be true, and the responses from hon. Members which are quoted in the appendix to the report do not bear it out. The Committee accurately assesses the views of Members in paragraph 19 on page 7 and in subsequent paragraphs.

Hon. Members mistrust central provision and I think that they are probably right to do so. Decisions on matters of this kind should not be handed over to the Executive or to the Government's business managers—by which I mean the Executive and the Government business managers of whatever party and not just the present regime, although on previous occasions I have noted its authoritarian tendencies. In my view, Members should safeguard what independence of decision-making they have. Each of us

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

should be allowed to do the job that we have been elected to do to the very best of our abilities and we should each make our own decisions on how best to go about that.

I do not believe that there is much of a future for shared computer systems paid for from our allowances. The submission in appendix 15 of the Information Select Committee report, submitted by Consort Systems Ltd., suggests that we could all put our information on the same computer and ensure through encryption that the data files created and used by members of one political party could not be accessed by members of another party. The company goes on to recommend that different constituencies within the same political party could, however, readily transfer between their respective computers, should they wish to do so. That recommendation slightly misses one or two nuances about this place.

It occurred to me, however, that if we had such arrangements in place in the Treasury, a joint paper could be issued on its attitude to a single European currency. The Chancellor could make his amendments to the document, the Chief Secretary could then make his, and so on: the result would be one document, but its contents would depend on who got to it last.

A separate debate has been conducted on what should be provided physically for Members here in the parliamentary estate and what should be paid for separately out of our allowances. The Information Select Committee report cheerfully refers to equipment for Members' constituency offices. The truth is that there is no guaranteed provision of a constituency office for a Member of Parliament. London Members can use the House of Commons offices, but the rest of us have to pay rent, telephone bills, cleaning costs and equipment and staffing costs from our existing secretarial allowances.

There is a strong case for reviewing what hon. Members are expected to be able to do and what they should have provided for them in their constituencies and at Westminster. The conditions in Parliament are primitive when compared with other legislatures. For example, we are provided with telephones, but even in this day and age, if we want a facsimile machine, we have to go out and buy it. The parliamentary estate will, of course, provide us with the telephone link and cover the bill, provided it is run from the House.

The report from the Information Select Committee makes some useful suggestions about training and maintenance. Once those recommendations were in the hands of the Finance and Services Committee, however, it said that they would have to be paid for from existing office costs allowance.

The Information Committee report also contains a recommendation that lists of available equipment should be made available to Members. So far no one seems to have come up with a good reason why that suggestion should be thwarted, so perhaps that reasonably harmless recommendation might get implemented, unless its inclusion was an oversight on the part of the Government's business managers.

That brings me to the twin and related issues of the cabling of the parliamentary estate and access to the clean feed. In paragraph 7 on page v of the first report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting, we are told:

"Whilst it would, in theory, be possible relatively quickly to provide the clean feed to Members' offices in those buildings (for example, No 1 Parliament Street, No 7 Millbank and Speaker's Court) which are already cabled for the purpose, it would clearly not be an economic proposition elsewhere in the Parliamentary estate to undertake this work as a separate project in advance of the main cabling exercise described in the preceding paragraph." That turns out to be completely untrue, as the resolution from the Committee meeting of Monday 27 June makes clear and as the Leader of the House made clear tonight.

The resolution is the unanimous view of the Committee and is presented to the House as such. Although I support it, it represents a compromise. It is intended to be as fair as possible to hon. Members in parliamentary outbuildings. The proposal is to bring the parliamentary feed to all the outbuildings by the end of the next Session and to bring the feed on stream at the beginning of the next Session where that can be done, notably at 7 Millbank and 1 Parliament street.

That raises a further question about making television services as well as the clean feed available to Members of Parliament. The retention of existing annunciators seems archaic and almost beyond reason. The sets cost more than conventional TV sets and convey hardly any information. Only a place like this could invent such an obtuse and pathetic method of conveying information. Those who favour the system can no doubt find someone else who wants to buy it.

Members of Parliament should have direct access in their offices to the clean feed from the Chamber, terrestrial television, Sky News and Sky Sport, as well as the central computer network support identified by the Information Committee. We should also have the same written statement as we have now, or something similar, to tell us what is happening in the Chamber.

An entire major British city can be cabled in a shorter time scale than that proposed by the Director of Works, under the direction of the Accommodation and Works Select Committee, for the Parliament building alone. I had an opportunity to listen to the matter being debated in detail in the Broadcasting Select Committee and I proposed that we bring in the private sector to do the job. My proposal was enthusiastically supported by the parliamentary Labour party representatives, but resisted by the forces of reaction represented among Tory Members We did our best to make progress but were constantly told that progress could not be made. I do not believe a word of it. The suggestion that it would take seven years to cable this building was absolutely ridiculous.

A further obvious thought is that the provision of support for Members of Parliament is decided in an episodic and essentially random way. This building and the collection of outbuildings surrounding it are not suited to the running of a modern Parliament. The failure to make a structured provision to support Members of Parliament exacerbates those problems. Every now and then, Back-Bench Members raid those issues and try to improve their lot. The Executive and the Government's business managers then try to claw back any gain that the rank and file have made.

Unfortunately, it is in the Executive's interest to keep other Members of Parliament as under-resourced as possible, so a huge fight is put up over relatively minor issues such as the provision of the clean feed. We are told that it is too difficult to provide the clean feed in Members' offices; yet every Ministry already has it. The Executive's professional advisers can monitor the Chamber at their convenience and entirely at public expense. The security

services, in their nice building south of the river, can also enjoy the clean feed, which is beamed across by satellite. But Members of Parliament cannot follow business in the Chamber while they work on other matters in their offices.Those arrangements clearly illustrate the priorities of the Executive. We should stand up for ourselves and assert the priorities of the House.

8.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I agree with the recommendations made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and I thank him for putting the case on which my colleagues on the Committee and our Chairman, who I hope will shortly be recovered, joined him for some two and a half years in careful study. The hon. Gentleman is an expert on the matter and I pay tribute to him for tutoring me on many aspects on which I was previously ignorant.

The experience of the Select Committee, which considered the recommendations for the information technology network, or PDVN, led us to concentrate not just on providing services for those who were technologically minded but on trying to make the technology really available and useful to hon. Members and Departments of the House, bearing in mind that hon. Members were not always computer literate and that therefore any system that we recommended must be user friendly.

Our recommendations were based on a pilot scheme, on which I was honoured to serve, the aims of which were primarily to decide the usefulness of the services provided by the network, the network's security, quality and technical reliability, the quality of training which hon. Members might receive, the quality of help desk facilities that hon. Members might need or encounter, and possible new services which might be available through the network. Colleagues on the Select Committee were not all experts or so-called computer buffs. Although many were experts, we were extremely careful to make recommendations that were useful and helpful to hon. Members.

Above all, we strove to ensure that the network and services, if recommended and adopted by the House, would be of real service to hon. Members, that they would be user friendly, and that those aspects of particular use to Members were concentrated on first. Typically, those would be the help desk and training, aspects of the parliamentary on-line information system, POLIS, easy access to information services such as news bulletins' easy access to procedural matters such as the selection of amendments which come before the House and in due course better access to *Hansard*.

The ability rapidly to transfer information between hon. Members, their staff and the House, and in due course their constituencies, was also considered at length. We considered carefully the provision of video facilities, television, teletext, the annunciator system, and so forth, bearing in mind that our recommendations should stand the test of time and be improved as and when new technology and finances were available. One of our principal objectives was to make the work of hon. Members and their staff in the House more time-effective so that they could serve their constituents better.

I am happy to commend the motions to the House, but I am extremely grateful for the motion commended by the Leader of the House because, throughout the Committee's deliberations, I raised the matter frequently and was particularly concerned about it. It would be illogical to have a first-class PVDN system, a network and computer access to news bulletins without being able to watch our proceedings in the House.

The Leader of the House rightly referred to different classes of hon. Members—some with clean feed and some without. An invidious position has arisen whereby, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) pointed out, Ministries and others have the clean feed while hon. Members, whose job it is to scrutinise everything that goes on in the House and particularly what is produced by the Executive, do not. Furthermore, the custom has been broken so that the Whips Offices have the clean feed while some senior hon. Members, such as Chairmen of Select Committees, do not.

I am therefore particularly grateful to the Leader of the House for commending the motions. I hope that the House will approve them and I commend them both to the House.

8.38 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) chose the right target in blaming the Government for all the difficulties in the development of the field that we are discussing. I have known sufficient Leaders of the House and Ministers who have tried to press things on both sides of the House over the years. I am afraid that the administration of the House of Commons is the real obstacle—the vested interests built up in this place, with which hon. Members do constant battle. They are perhaps winning more than they used to.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To clear the point up, I think that there is a great deal in what my hon. Friend says.

Dr. Bray: I am grateful, and I am sure that the Leader of the House—

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman will kindly allow another intervention, I refrained with great difficulty from intervening in the speech of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) because, given how helpful I have been about this lot, I thought that the criticism was a bit unfair.

Dr. Bray: I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ought to sit down at that point.

It is right to leave the provision of equipment to the individual responsibility of Members, to finance under their own office costs allowance. Individual procurement has produced, in recent years, a far faster rate of penetration of new techniques in the House than it would have done if there had been a centrally provided House of Commons service on the pattern of some past proposals that have been put to the House, which I, in those days, opposed.

It is a rapidly moving sector. Individual Members have their existing stock of equipment; they have different requirements; they have different types of software. It is sensible to leave it to their initiative, with the wide range of advice available to Members.

I see no harm in having registered suppliers. It helps to get Members going. It helps to introduce new technologies. The multi-media field will grow. Members will need help in getting their compact discs going on their machines and

[Dr. Bray]

so on, so there should by all means be some registered suppliers. However, those suppliers will never be able to compete with the prices that one can obtain in the mail order pages of the computer magazines, which we all buy on our way to and from our constituencies.

I see no harm in site licences for commonly used software, but Members will quickly drift away from any site licence standard. Some of them will want to upgrade faster; others will want to move more slowly, and any central licence provision would not cope with the variety of Members' needs; but that does not mean that, if there were a site licence, it would not meet the needs of some.

Training is always valuable, and I am sure that the idea of partly providing that in house and being prepared to buy in training facilities to meet peak demands, as at the beginning of a new Parliament, is a good idea.

As to the PDVN, on the initial question of the content of the services, yes, the live feed and the television access are obviously of common importance. However, for evidence of the data services available, we are indebted to the evidence from our own staff, from the representatives of the Transport and General Workers Union and the Secretaries and Assistants Council, who provided one of the only two lists of actual services that appear in the records of the Committee.

The Library, which provides the other list, makes an important distinction, on page 102 of the first report of the Information Committee 1993-94, between the "minimum services", which should be provided without a doubt—POLIS, CD-ROM server, Library and Statistical Section servers and so on—and what it calls "desirable services".

I think that the "desirable services" are essential for the development of an open and developing system: for example, the independent access by Members to the Press Association's Telpress service, the access to electronic mail—external electronic mail, not internal House of Commons electronic mail—to Internet, of course to JANET and to Super-JANET and the possibility of fax transmission, inward and outward, and fax storage.

The range of information services that will be available electronically will increase enormously in future, as almost all printed material is now generated by electronic means and the electronic form of it will become available to networks. I find it extraordinary that we have allowed the situation to develop where our own Library does not even have a site licence for access to *Hansard*.

We may be right in having forgone setting up the House of Commons Library as a copyright library, in the way that the Library of Congress is in the United States, but for us not to have access to the record of our own words is a bit rich. We should certainly make it a condition that all Her Majesty's Stationery Office-generated material should be available, free of charge, to Members through the House of Commons, in the same way that printed material is.

On the openness of services, the practical freedom with which that will operate will depend enormously on the use of industry-standard software and hardware in this place. I confess that I am more than a little alarmed at the jargon in the technical report on the actual type of network to be installed in annex A on page 15 to the memorandum from the Director of Finance and Administration and the Computer Officer. I am not sure, from that, the extent of fibre-optic use in the network and the extent of coaxial cable or even twisted pair, but we are already wide users of fibre-optic networks in our own offices, and for that not to be the standard that is used throughout the building and outbuilding and so on seems absurd.

When, in my constituency, all my constituents will be on fibre-optic networks shortly—the United Artists network—they will want personal interviews with their Members on their own private channel in the Netherton ward of Motherwell on a Friday evening. I shall be happy to provide that, provided that that link is into my office, both at home, where it will be provided by United Artists, I am sure, and also from this place.

It is not only the hardware that needs to develop rapidly in terms of industry standards, but the software and the types of software that will be required. Nowadays, we have authoring systems with the capacity to produce those clever information booths, such as we have down below in the Meteorological Office weather forecasting terminal. The authoring of that type of service—public access, public inquiry systems and so on—will be well within the capacity of the good, competent research assistants that hon. Members on both sides of the House employ in large numbers.

We are in a hugely rapidly moving field, and unless we have open and industry-standard systems, Parliament will lag far behind. I think that the spirit of Members—it is clearly and well set out in the report—is to open it up and let it rip. I am sure that the my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East is right—seven years is nonsense.

8.47 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I join in the tributes that have been paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) for the hard work that he has put into the preparation of the report. Given the speed of the cabling operations that are now under way in Leeds and Bradford, I like to think that, even if he is lying on his sick bed, he may be watching our proceedings at this moment. Whether that will hasten his recovery is a different matter.

There is no job specification for a Member of Parliament. Each of us chooses to do our job in the way that we best deem fit. For many of us, if not for all, a PDVN system is a fundamental necessity to do the job that we think we ought to be doing.

It seems to me that four specific aspects are crucial. The first is what we as individuals want out of the system. Members may want different things; they may want electronic mail or access to databases. I find the British Rail planning system quite useful—when the trains are running. It is good that we can have bolt-on services; they will give Members for the first time the chance to operate in an IT framework—most commercial and industrial organisations would have taken that for granted a decade ago.

We shall now be able to link the various services available in Westminster, in the Library and in Whitehall, and that will give us easier and more rapid transfer of knowledge, which will be all to the good. As a result, we will be able to respond much more quickly to the needs of our constituents.

Increasingly, Members of Parliament want constituency offices with which they can communicate electronically.

Nowadays, our secretaries often work in the constituencies, so Members want their post dealt with there but printed out here, so that it can be sent off expeditiously. There is no reason why that should not be done.

I find access to the system from home invaluable at weekends and during recesses, particularly when I cannot use the excellent services of the House Library but want access to the latest information. I hope that Library briefs will be available on the system before long. I would find them extraordinarily useful when I am rung up by a local radio station at 8 o'clock in the morning and asked to contribute to a programme in an hour's time. It would be very useful to check information that may be discussed on the programme.

It must therefore be obvious that the Committee was absolutely right to dismiss out of hand the idea of central planning of what should be available. That will enable each of us to add to the system the peripherals that we find suitable. I am beginning to experiment with the CD-ROM drive and *Hansard* on them, and that too is valuable. I am sure that others will find it advantageous as well.

When the Committee visited other Parliaments to see their networks and to examine how they worked, I was struck by the arrogant element in the decisions by other Administrations to tell their Members what they needed —the poor dears could not understand the systems for themselves, so they had to have what was given them. It was noticeable that the equipment lacked the capacity to keep up with the times and could not reflect sudden changes, or indeed, provide Members with what they would have chosen had they controlled their systems and budgets themselves.

Similarly, it is absurd that Members cannot have a clean feed at the earliest possible opportunity. When it was put to us that the system would take about seven years to put in place, I was as horrified as everyone else. I do not think that any of us would be able to force a change of view, but in the Committee we expressed our horror at that delay. As has been said already, it would take that long to cable a major city in the United Kingdom. That cannot be right. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will give the matter serious consideration, and will press for whatever is needed to bring in a modern system at the earliest possible date.

The pilot scheme has proved a great success with the hon. Members who participated in it. The measure of that success is the number of other hon. Members who are asking to join the system, but who, because of its limited budgetary arrangements, cannot do so.

We have a flexible and easily adapted system for the future, and I hope that the House will give it its warmest approval this evening.

8.53 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): As a serving member of the Finance and Services Committee, I should like to make a brief contribution. Earlier, the Leader of the House said that this was the first debate following the creation of the new domestic Committees recommended in the Ibbs report, and it is therefore something of an historic occasion.

The motions before us have been produced by the House's own domestic Committees, charged with the duty of giving detailed consideration to all these issues. They have produced immensely useful work, and we should pay tribute not only to the hon. Members for Denton And Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Keighley (Mr. Waller) but to the members of staff who assisted the process. The tributes to them all are well merited.

We are engaged in an important process, in which the House has the chance to take a view on the work of the Committees, so that their recommendations can be returned and implemented by the Finance and Services Committee and by the House of Commons Commission. This is the first evidence we have had that the Ibbs committee procedure is working, and I pay tribute to the Leader of the House for making as much progress as he has. He was made responsible for bringing the process together and for setting up the system. The comments made earlier, to the effect that the right hon. Gentleman is responsible for the delay, were very far from the truth.

I was heartened to find in 1984, only 12 short months after my election to this House, that we were turning our attention to what I considered the important question of information technology.

Unfortunately, nothing happened for the next 10 years, until the creation of the Ibbs Committee system and the new urgency with which the Leader of the House and the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee dealt with these matters. That is all to the credit of the right hon. Gentleman. He will excuse me if I say that he is no power user of personal computers; he may be a powerful PC, but he himself would acknowledge that he is not a power user of PCs.

I am pleased that we have come so far so fast. It has been intimated that it may take seven years to implement the full system, and the Committee has found that acceptable. Now it is for the House to take a view, which is what we have been doing this evening. I am sure that the Commission and the Committee will pay careful attention to what has been said here.

I was impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). It is good to know that the official Opposition are so progressive. Some senior members of the Opposition—indeed of all parties —are Luddites, but we have to learn to live with these technologies as best we may.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I do not know how closely the hon. Gentleman follows current affairs, but the Labour party is going through a period of transition.

Mr. Kirkwood: I can only hope that the PDVN assists the process.

We need continually to investigate better ways of doing our job. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) was right about that, and the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr.Batiste) also had some important things to say along the same lines. If one wants to improve the legislative process, the scrutiny of the Executive and our ability to represent our constituents' interests, we must always seek ways to improve the efficiency of this place.

Information systems which enable us to make better use of our time and resources must be embraced and welcomed, as far and as fast as resources allow. The transfer of information between Members and their staff and between Westminster and our constituencies will, during the next two or three years, become increasingly important.

Looking at the matter the other way round, the prospect of not accepting the recommendations and abandoning the

[Mr. Kirkwood]

work that has been done is inconceiveable. The only question is how far and how fast we make progress. I hope that the House will assist that process by accepting the recommendations.

I have two caveats. First, I do not know what other hon. Members think, but being over-ambitious about targets with information technology can lead to grief. We must become accustomed to the idea of developing individual systems in order to meet particular needs. There are particular needs within the Departments of the House, within the offices of Members of Parliament and within the offices of the shadow administration and Ministers. They will all need their own refined systems to do their particular work.

What encourages me more than anything else about the burden of the report is that we are concentrating on getting the infrastructure right. I am sure that we should concentrate our resources on the main information byways and highways and getting in the cabling. I agree that we should be looking at fibre-optics as well. None of those things should be left out of the equation.

However, the main thing is to put in the infrastructure so that the basic system exists into which people can dip, using and developing it in an individual way to the best of their ability and according to their needs. The core services proposed are an essential minimum in order that the system can be developed.

The House will have to accept that some physical disruption will be inevitable if we are to speed up the introduction of the core system. I for one, as a member of the Finance and Services Committee, am prepared to face up to that. We also have to accept that there will be teething problems. But that is a small price to pay for the advantages that a properly run and used system can bring. The Finance and Services Committee considered the matter long and hard, and I am convinced that the investment is justified on a cost-benefit analysis in the long term.

As was mentioned earlier, the training element must not be overlooked. That is as important an investment as the infrastructure. The rate at which the system can be expanded and developed depends a lot on training.

I have two grouses that were referred to earlier, but which I wish to underscore. I make a particular plea for POLIS 3 to be developed as quickly as possible. It is a matter of some disappointment to hon. Members that we do not have access to the benefits and advantages of the higher specification of the system that was described as POLIS 3.

A particular plea must also be made, which I hope will go out from the debate, to the Commission and to the Finance and Services Committee, for better and direct access to *Hansard* on line. As the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) said, it is ridiculous that we do not have access to downloaded texts from the *Official Report*.

If people are complaining that Whips have access to clean feed, at least it tells me, as a member of the usual channels in this place, where my 22 Members of Parliament are or are not at a given time. If we put cameras in some of the Bars, such as Annie's Bar, that would also help the Whips. I would go for full surveillance on some Back-Bench Members. *[Interruption.]* I may get into trouble as a Liberal Democrat for saying that, so I withdraw it. I was getting carried away with my own rhetoric. The clean feed is as important to Whips as it is to other Members, and the sooner we have it the better.

Critical mass is an important element to the success of any proper network. The faster that people are signed up and make use of the network, the more use it will be to all of us. Between now and the next election will be a critical period for us. If we can use the intervening two or three years to put the core infrastructure and training in place, when the new intake comes, as it will, the new Members will be much more willing to embrace the system if we can offer it to them with training as soon as they arrive here. That is a great opportunity that we must not miss. If we do, it will be another four or five years before we have the same opportunity.

I am grateful for the work that has been done. This is an encouraging report, which I hope the House will embrace with enthusiasm.

9.3 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I join those hon. Members who have paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) who has worked hard on the Information Committee in the past few years and with whom I have had regular discussions about the progress of the work. I am not a member of the Committee but I have taken quite an interest in the parliamentary data and video network. It is important. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for the way in which he introduced the report today.

It is a good report which covers a number of aspects of the parliamentary data and video network. It leads hon. Members into a difficult area in a readable manner.

I pay tribute also to the staff who work on the parliamentary data and video network and to the consultants. Although they are not official House of Commons staff, they make it possible for us to join the network, and they work hard to connect our offices to it. I have had some favourable experiences. I am glad that my staff are connected to the network, and that I even have my own sub-network below the PDVN that allows me to communicate directly with my staff.

I look forward to getting full control of the system this summer, to reduce the 80,000 pieces of paper that I estimate go through my office in a year. If we are honest, as I am sure we are, I am sure that we would admit that the odd piece of paper occasionally goes missing. How much easier it would be if many of those documents could be electronically captured and accessed with modern technology. I hope that will be one of the benefits of my office going as near-electronic as it possibly can in the next 12 months.

The proposal before us is modest. It is a question of catching up not with 1994 but with some years back. Members of Parliament are dangerously behind in relation to the rest of the country. University students and others have moved on to electronic networking in their universities and beyond, to communicate worldwide. I am working with a number of schools in my constituency to help ensure that their pupils will be at the forefront of information technology education, so that Dover can attract the employers of the future. We want to compete for jobs with not only Europe and the rest of the country but —dare I say it—with my colleagues in the House in

attracting the employers of the future, who look for young people trained in computer technology. It will be no use if Members of Parliament do not take the lead. Our constituents expect us to do that, and to understand the technology.

I examined, as an accountant might do, the cost of the proposals. For a few years, it might cost £3,000 per annum per Member of Parliament. I remind the House that many of our constituents possess £3,000-worth of electronic equipment in their homes, perhaps without realising it—let alone in their offices. One pensioner wrote to me about his NICAM stereo video recorder, which cost more than £1,000. He is not particularly well off but is housebound, and regards that piece of equipment as important to him. If one adds the value of other domestic electronic equipment to be found in the homes of many of our constituents, it totals a considerable sum.

The proposed expenditure is small by comparison with businesses. If one visits a senior manager's office in one's constituency or in the City, one will see secretaries using electronic equipment worth £20,000 or £30,000 that serves to connect the office with any part of the world. Many secretaries in London and throughout the country communicate on behalf of their bosses and companies with offices in Japan, America and elsewhere.

It is important that Members of Parliament consider the PDVN not only on an insular basis, in respect of the House and Westminster, but how it might be used in communicating with the rest of the world.

It is no good, however, if in doing so we set up a system that—according to the timetable in the report—might be installed by the year 2001, when many of our constituents have been using it since 1990 or 1992. The system must be modern and appropriate, and must enable us to communicate better with our constituents and take up their cases in Whitehall as soon as possible. We should accept nothing less than a one-year timetable; otherwise, perhaps heads should begin to roll.

I do not mind if it takes a little over a year if the excuses are good, but I do not think that "There is a lot of asbestos in the basement of the House of Commons" or "This is an old building" are acceptable excuses. We must find ways of modernising the building to meet the needs of the modern age. I am fed up with the mice in the Tea Room and the quill pens in the Library: we should be operating in a proper environment, facing the electronic age and obtaining speedy questions to the representations of our constituents.

Electronic mail and the PDVN must be introduced rapidly. I am not referring just to communications within Westminster; I am thinking of communication with Government Departments when we take up our constituents' cases, and communication with those constituents.

The United States Congress has just begun an experiment. Through the Internet, a number of Congressmen are now receiving electronic mail from their constituents, and Congress committees can be contacted by that means. I know that because I recently joined the Internet, and have been communicating not only with people in America but with people all over the world. I have taken evidence for the Select Committee on Social Security from Americans whom I contacted by posting to a news group: ordinary American citizens have contributed information about the American child support system by that method.

All that is possible, but we are taking things far too slowly. We are not obtaining information that is available in the rest of the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) said earlier, we should be putting the Library on to the PDVN and making all its services—briefs and reports, for example—available to hon. Members in their constituencies. Hon. Members such as myself whose offices are in Millbank should be able to gain access to our offices from the Library via the PDVN when there are a large number of votes, as there will be in the next few weeks: there should be terminals in the Library for that purpose.

The PDVN should be wired up to the Internet as soon as possible. The Internet is connected to some 2 million computers worldwide, and 40 million people are believed to have access to it. It has contact with 60 countries, and I understand that it is connected to 18 coffee houses in San Francisco. As the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) pointed out, there is a British system—Janet and Super Janet—which could be connected with the PDVN, and would provide a number of services for university students. Not only would it allow them to send questions to Members of Parliament; it could be a two-way process, allowing Members of Parliament more access to research work in universities and colleges.

Some hon. Members will be concerned about the security implications, but we should consider all the possibilities. Unless we establish the right operation in the House of Commons, we shall not even begin to do that. It is perverse that I can read President Clinton's diary and find out his appointments—*[Interruption.]*—perhaps not all his appointments—when all too often I am not informed about when Ministers are coming to my constituency.

We must address the issue of the PDVN and the Government databases. There are all sorts of databases in Whitehall that the Government make available to corporations and the corporate sector. Use of the databases is charged at £60 or £70 an hour and Members of Parliament do not have access to them under the present arrangements. That is wrong. We must have access to all Government databases so that we know what statistics and information the Government are producing.

The PDVN must be made accessible in some way—I accept, in a secure way—to the public. We have to find a secure way of separating use by Members of Parliament from public use. There are companies that have worked out how it can be done. I understand that DEC has resolved the problem in America for its access to the Internet. It has set up a separate and secure access system.

Since I have been on the Internet I have noticed a number of people out there who want access to *Hansard*. Many people have asked whether they can access the work of Parliament and the Government. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) because one learns something new from every debate. I had not fully appreciated the significance of the fact that "HMSO" appears on the bottom of *Hansard*. I was shocked to learn that as a consequence we have now given up the copyright. That is totally unacceptable. We must take back that copyright. We must make *Hansard* available not just to members of the British public but to members of the public all over the world who want to see what the British Parliament is up to.

We are the mother of Parliaments and we are regarded by many people in the Commonwealth countries and in many of the 60 countries on the Internet as a Parliament

[Mr. David Shaw]

that debates issues of the day in a way that they would like to discover. We should be making available to the rest of the world our debates and discussions. We must continue to be a leading Parliament.

I should like to see us using our PDVN to access information in Europe. I want to have more control over Brussels. I am not satisfied with our control and influence over European issues in European debates. We should connect our PDVN so that we can access databases on the continent.

Parliament is about conveying information. It is about using our speeches and words in our constituents' interests. It is about controlling the Executive and controlling the use of information that should rightly be available to Members of Parliament. We must move forward. The report is about moving forward and we should fully support it and the work of the PDVN.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Five hon. Members wish to catch my eye and we have about half an hour before we have to wind up. I make a plea for concise speeches.

9.17 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I do not understand why the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) objects to the provision of mice in the Tea Room. He should come to the Labour side where we have two who entertain us regularly after 11 o'clock. We have no objection to some of the mice in the Tea Room.

I am a member of the Finance and Services Committee, and I am pleased to support the motions in the names of the Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) and my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). I congratulate them on their hard work and progressive achievements. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish for presenting the report.

I thank all the staff who have helped in the production of the report. I know of the tremendous amount of work that has gone into the production of the report and the motions. When we read the documents and the report, it is easy to appreciate the large amount of work that has been done by everybody. I am pleased that some of the hon. Members involved have been mentioned. We will all benefit from the reports.

The reports and resolutions to which the motions refer contain important proposals to provide hon. Members with the technological means to cope with the ever-increasing burden of parliamentary duties. The sooner the benefits of the proposed PDVN and the related facility of the clean feed of parliamentary proceedings are made available, not just to hon. Members and their staff in the outbuildings, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said, in the Palace of Westminster itself, the better. I say that because we share an office upstairs above the No Lobby and we would be grateful for the provision of such facilities.

I have the honour of being Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee. I have been privileged, along with my colleagues and their predecessors, to have played a part in on-going efforts to bring accommodation and facilities for hon. Members, their staff and House staff up to a reasonable standard. That has meant the acquisition and development of a number of outbuildings near the Palace of Westminster—an exercise which has recently yielded 127 extra offices for hon. Members at 7 Millbank and which will reach its culmination in 1999 when the exciting new parliamentary building, designed by Michael Hopkins and his partners, becomes available to hon. Members. Perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will have noted that the facilities mentioned in the report will not be installed until seven years after 1999.

In recent years, enormous strides have been made to improve the standards of hon. Members' office accommodation, which has now transformed the parliamentary estate into a campus of buildings. That welcome development emphasises the need for modern and effective methods of communication, and dictates that the technological means to bring about better communication must be in place as quickly as possible.

I emphasise, however, that most major works projects in Parliament are necessarily limited to the summer recess. That, coupled with the need to minimise inconvenience, means that some projects need to be phased over more than one summer recess and, in some cases, over more than one year. It is important to understand that the programmes of work inevitably cause disruption and mean that Members and staff have to be relocated temporarily while their offices are refurbished.

My Committee has foremost in its mind the need to ensure that disruption is kept to a minimum and has instructed that all necessary steps, including consultation with those who will be affected, be taken to achieve that aim. That requires the co-operation and understanding of those involved. The report states that 327 hon. Members replied to the survey, and just over 50 per cent. stated that they wanted the facility. Members must appreciate, therefore, that there will be some disruption to their normal working life, even though it might be in the summer recess.

I pay tribute, and it is rarely paid, to the Serjeant at Arms, the Deputy Serjeant at Arms, the Deputy Assistant Serjeant at Arms and particularly to Judy Scott Thomson and all the staff. They should be congratulated on the work that they have undertaken in speedily, readily and efficiently informing hon. Members of disruption while works are carried out.

Hon. Members will recall that in March 1992, after the House had approved the Ibbs report but before the establishment of the Finance and Services Committee, the House approved the design of the new building in the first debate on a report from the Accommodation and Works Committee. My colleagues on the Committee and I will continue to monitor the progress of the new building. Should the House so decide, we will play our part in planning for the introduction of the new network of services as quickly as is practicable.

As for the video side of the network, I accept the importance of Members being able to receive a televised clean feed of parliamentary proceedings in their offices, and I hope that serious consideration will be given to providing a satellite as well as a terrestrial broadcast. The value of regular televised news broadcasts was proved during the Gulf conflict, and Sky already provides a satellite service to the television viewing room. I hope that that aspect of television viewing can be incorporated into the planning for television reception for Members.

I should say a lot more, but I realise that time is moving on, and my colleagues want to participate in the debate. Finally, I must point out that, as a result of the introduction of the overdue new facilities that we propose, some Members may not attend the debates in the Chamber. We all appreciate that Members serve on Committees. I refer in particular to the Leader of the House, whom I see so often in Committees that I attend; he cannot be expected to be in the Chamber all the time as well.

I hope that people outside the House of Commons appreciate that Members of Parliament have other duties to perform, and realise that they may be serving the House and yet not in the Chamber. I hope that the media will play their part in ensuring that people outside Parliament understand that dilemma confronting Members of Parliament, and will not expect them to be in the Chamber for each and every debate.

9.26 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I preface my remarks by declaring an interest as a Member sponsored by the National Communications Union, because what I say concerns the telephone system too.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller)—my fellow vice-chairman of the parliamentary information technology committee—my hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and the Leader of the House on their speeches and the clarity of their remarks.

Unfortunately, as my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) said, some of the material is not clear. I am looking at the PDVN pilot technical review, and it looks as though what is being proposed is the tree and branch network, the branches being twisted pair. The old annunciators use one twisted quad, and the proposed network looks somewhat long in the tooth even now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East said that it took as long to cable this building as it takes to cable a major city. He is right, but that is only because of the method selected for this building. That need not be the same as the method selected for the outer buildings. As a result of the recommendations of the old Computer Sub-Committee, which I had the honour to chair 10 years ago, and which produced the original report, they were designed to take those possibilities on board.

This building is technically an extremely difficult building to cable—but cable technology has not stood still in all that time, although to read the document one might think that it had. There have been developments such as blown fibre cabling; fibre optic cable can blown through existing conduits without disturbing anything. If a fibre optic cable comes in contact with a 250-volt bare wire, nothing happens: it is a better insulator than the insulation round the cable. So we do not need to worry about that.

We could use far more inventive ways of cabling the building. I grant that that would cost a little more because of the cost of terminal equipment, but much of that cost would be saved. I note that another part of the report deals with the fire alarm system, the security system, the telephone system, the data system and the video system. They can all go through the same fibre, and still leave masses of spare bandwidth capacity, if it is done on a switch star rather than a tree and branch basis. I am sorry to have to use such terms, but there is no other way of describing the systems.

We do not know what our successors in Parliament will need in 10 or 15 years' time. Things have changed dramatically in my 15 years in the House. The amount of paperwork, the things with which we have to deal and the information to which we need to have access have increased; the rate of change has been logarithmic and will continue. The people sitting in our places in 10 to 15 years' time will have a different perception of the system.

The system must be resilient to technological change, so it must have the inherent bandwidth capability to take those developments. The system proposed at present, especially in this building, will not be able to do that. The position is easier in the outer buildings because they have wiring trays. It is difficult to cable in this building, but if we were imaginative, if we used new cabling technologies and if we were prepared to pay a little extra—although we could consider hanging the other systems on the fibre optic system—we would not have to wait until it was nearly time for me to retire before getting the system in this building. We could have such a system quickly and reasonably inexpensively, and we could get it done without detriment to the architectural heritage of this building, which is extremely important. We can get it done to cope with the reasonable needs of our successors in 10 to 15 years' time.

9.30 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I endorse the thanks given to hon. Friends, other hon. Members and staff of the House who have made this debate possible. I have a particular interest in it. I first came to the House more than 20 years ago as a secretary. In those days, secretaries did not have individual telephones and we still used manual typewriters with carbon paper and flimsy copies. We have moved on, but not far enough.

The Information Committee report concluded:

"We recommend the phased introduction of a full Parliamentary Data and Video Network. It is a principal function of Parliament to oversee the actions of the Executive. Members have a responsibility to represent their constituents effectively. In both these key areas, we consider the provision of a full network would greatly increase the efficiency with which the House operates and the capacity of Members to cope with increasing workloads."

Before compiling the report, the Information Committee conducted a questionnaire among Members of Parliament. More than 50 per cent. returned the questionnaires and more than half expressed a wish for the direct reception of the televised proceedings of the House. Direct access from their personal computers to the *Official Report* was requested by more than half who replied and almost as many required access to POLIS—the parliamentary on-line information service. Many showed an interest in having direct access to external information services, such as the FT Profile which provides the ability to search for and retrieve the full text of items drawn from daily newspapers and other publications.

The pilot scheme, to which hon. Members have already referred, has been successful and has been used extensively by members of staff as well as by Members of Parliament. Among the benefits of a full network would be direct access at any time to the Library and other information services, both from within and outside the parliamentary estate.

[Ms Janet Anderson]

As other hon. Members have said, such a system is especially important for Members who feel it increasingly important to have constituency offices. The majority of Opposition Members have such offices and I believe that many Conservative Members do as well.

The use of electronically stored newspaper reference services, such as the FT Profile, and services now available on compact discs and CD-ROM in the Library are seen as a major benefit. CD-ROMs, although not necessarily providing full information, are cheaper as once they have been purchased, their use involves no further cost. Such cost considerations must be a major factor in any decision on the future expansion of the service.

I believe that the service would enable hon. Members and their staff to make more effective use of their time and resources, which are always fully stretched, as we know. It would also help, certainly in the initial stages, to reduce the demand from Members on overworked and over-burdened Library staff who provide an excellent service for us all, but who must surely long for the day when we do not have to bother them with more trivial inquiries. That would no longer be necessary if all hon. Members had access to the data and video network.

We are sent here by our constituents to represent their interests. We have a duty to ensure that we can do that as effectively as possible. As the Information Committee report concluded, the provision of a full network would greatly increase the efficiency with which the House operates and the capacity of Members to cope with the demands of their constituents.

Therefore, we have a duty and a responsibility on behalf of our constituents to do what we can to ensure that a full network is provided for all hon. Members and their staff without further delay. I hope and feel that that is the mood of the House tonight.

9.34 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Select Committee on Information was my first taste of the Committee process in the House after I was elected in the 1992 election. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), for his sterling work in chairing the Committee and, indeed, to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who moved the motion, because he has also done a tremendous amount of work on behalf of fellow Committee members.

I joined that Committee as a result of a conversation with the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) in which I expressed my frustration, as a new hon. Member, about the inadequacies of information technology in the building. At that, the hon. Member for Jarrow invited me to join the Select Committee on Information, and, as hon. Members will know, invitations from the hon. Member for Jarrow are not readily refused. I was delighted, because not only did I find myself at the heart of the debate about information technology, but, of course, because the Committee has important responsibilities in respect of the Library, which provides a sterling service for us all.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) made an interesting comment on the possibilities of what can happen from his house because of the evolution of IT systems. I find it quite extraordinary in this day and age that the gas board cannot lay a gas main to provide a service to my house, yet I can communicate with my constituency office and with my parliamentary office using the parliamentary data network in its pilot form. That network facility would greatly improve the efficiency of the operation of Members of Parliament and, indeed, improve the efficiency of the communication of information to our constituents, who are entitled to receive all information which emanates from this place.

Only this week, I have needed to write a complicated letter in relation to a case which is currently in front of the Police Complaints Authority. That letter related to an enormous amount of files, some of which were here and some of which were in my parliamentary office. Instead of having to wait until next weekend, when I could get my hands on all the documentation, it was possible to put together the documents, have the letter typed at the other end, and have it checked, printed and signed by me at this end. Our constituents ought to demand such a service from us and I know that, increasingly, they will do so, because that is the sort of service that they will get from companies operating in the big, wide world outside.

The Committee looked at the network and studied a number of examples of what happens in other countries. My hon. Friends have mentioned the Canadian system and the United States system, but one incredible statistic in the report is that, of all the countries in Europe, with the exception of one—Turkey—we do not have a parliamentary network. That is an extraordinary omission on our part and we are doing an enormous disservice to the efficiency of our offices and our constituents by not joining the current part of this century, let alone looking forward.

One of the most basic facilities that I use heavily, which I commend to hon. Members to improve effectiveness, is the ability to control one's diary from three places simultaneously. It is an incredibly powerful tool. It needs some managerial control, or all sorts of people may end up controlling one's diary, but, with proper control, such facilities are possible.

Recently, I found that I needed to communicate with an organisation in Geneva, with which I have had a number of contacts over the year. I did that simply by sending an E-mail message. It cost little more than the price of a local telephone call for the message to get into the Geonet network and be picked up by the mail box holder at the other end. It is a secure system; it works; it is efficient; and it is cheaper than transmitting all the message in a conventional telephone conversation. That is the sort of technology that this place needs.

The services of the Library have been mentioned at length. The provision of those services through an extension of POLIS will be of enormous benefit to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I shall refer to the comments that have been made about cabling and the timetable. It is clear that we should examine—what my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), with his expertise in telecommunications, said is right—the cable technology of tomorrow in the context of all the low-voltage services that we need around the building.

Mr. McWilliam: My hon. Friend should understand that I was talking about the cable technology of today, not the cable technology of tomorrow.

Mr. Miller: I totally accept that, but the reason why I used that expression is that I believe it is technology that

has a long lifespan ahead of it because, unlike many other areas of technology, it is very much the limit of known transmission knowledge, without going into the wireless field which would present us with all sort of other problems, although that might have to be examined. The services that we must examine in that context—the network, fire services, telephone services, television, clean feed, and security—can all be dealt with in one cable network.

As a member of the Information Committee and an enthusiast for dragging this place into the 21st century—although I believe passionately in the need to protect the integrity of old buildings—I could speak at length on this subject, but I realise that other hon. Members want to get in before the end of the debate. I shall therefore conclude my remarks by saying that if we, as parliamentarians of one mind, are determined to drive the programme forward, we can cut down the time that is needed to develop it. On that basis, I commend the report of the Information Committee to the House.

9.42 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): As someone who used the pilot scheme, I am glad to be able to make what will obviously be a brief contribution to what has been a non-contentious debate.

When I entered the House, having worked as a computer network manager previously, I must confess that I was somewhat taken by surprise at the low level of development of information technology systems in the House, the variety of systems in use, their incompatibility, and the virtual absence of training for hon. Members and their staff. I suspect that we all know what the results of that have been: inefficiencies of various sorts, equipment bought which is probably not very good, poor usage of systems and duplication of effort—an enormous waste of time by people searching for the same information.

Of course, this place uses and generates a vast amount of information. As several hon. Members have already pointed out, if one looked at any public or private sector organisation, one would see that we are years behind in the development of information systems.

I am sure that hon. Members realise that the network will not cure all ills. I am sure that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) knows that it is perfectly possible to lose a piece of data just as comprehensively in a computer system as it is to lose a letter on paper.

I shall speak briefly about two issues. The first is the data services which are to be available. I think the core services listed in the recommendations are sensible, but I shall refer—as has been mentioned earlier—to the question of updating POLIS. That has been long overdue and as it develops it will improve access to other parliamentary information. That is where I think the priorities ought to be in the first place—on Library briefings and the inclusion of the full text of *Hansard*. As services such as those develop, and as access is gained to other external services, we shall find that—unless we get on quickly with the installation —first, we discourage users, and secondly, that the technology will be virtually out of date before the system has been completed.

The second issue is the question of training, and there are a number of aspects to that. The first aspect is persuading people to use the facilities which are available and showing them what is possible. I am a little disturbed that the Finance Committee has suggested that none of the training should be provided directly for Members without the funds coming out of office costs. There is a case for providing some basic training free to improve people's efficiency and to ensure that they are able to use the network efficiently.

They must know what is available and how the software can be used. We will improve the network's efficiency if we do that. I shall be certainly concerned if people are not to be barred from access to the system while they are untrained. What will the effects be of large numbers of untrained people using the network? That will have consequences for the efficiency of the system for everyone else. If we are to consider extensions of the network into expensive external systems, databases and E-mail, it is almost essential that training is forced. If people are not trained, we shall have inefficiency and greatly increased costs, which will be money wasted.

I shall make my final point because we wish to hear from the Chairman of the Finance Committee before the debate closes. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) mentioned that this is not just about producing systems for the convenience of Members of Parliament but about increasing our efficiency and enabling us to deal with our constituents better. We shall be able to produce answers quickly and get at the information that is needed to produce those answers quickly.

Another important aspect of our job is the ability to keep track of what the Executive is doing.It is important to bear that in mind. Someone listening to the debate might have thought that we were talking about our convenience and whether we could watch Sky Sport. While I very much like to do that, although some bits of it may irritate my staff, I am more interested in having parliamentary systems which enable me to do my job efficiently for my constituents.

9.47 pm

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): First, I apologise to the House for arriving late to the debate. I have been abroad on parliamentary business and my flight was late coming back. The second, and much more serious, thing for which I ought to apologise is the fact that I am perhaps the only layman in a Chamber of experts. I feel rather like Daniel in the lions' den.

Luckily the Finance and Services Committee have taken a course which was acceptable to the House—otherwise, I have a feeling that I would have been howled down. With the support of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), the Finance and Services Committee has come to the right decision.

This, in fact, is the first occasion on which the House has had a debate such as this on a new service since the foundation of the Finance and Services Committee. The Committee was given the task of looking at the financial and administrative implications of recommendations made by Committees such as the Information Committee and the Broadcasting Committee. Like other hon. Members, I congratulate the Chairmen of those Committees on the splendid work that has been done. The Committee has considered the network in detail, both the justification for it and the cost of its provision. Given the hour and the fact

[Mr. Paul Channon]

that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) hopes to reply to the debate, I will not go into that in great detail.

The Committee accept the benefits and those colleagues who are more technologically minded than I am, will understand them better than I do. We accept the argument that Members should be provided with additional modern facilities to help them, as the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) rightly said, in their parliamentary duties, not just to have a bit of fun.

This is a complicated matter and costs are extremely complicated. We shall monitor developments closely each year as we look at the works programme and prepare the estimates that go to the Commission. We must be guided by the Information Select Committee and by officers of the House as to what services can be funded on the network. We do not, of course, want to overburden that system and its staff. We shall have to consider that factor every year in the estimates.

I note in particular what the hon. Member for Walthamstow said about training and obviously my Committee will consider that in the light of today's debate.

I am rather less keen on the clean feed than any other Member in the Chamber now, but I accept that the overwhelming majority of people want it and that the overwhelming majority are very upset about the seven-year rule. The Finance and Services Select Committee obviously understands that and we shall ask the Director of Works to report to us in the autumn about how a new timing might be achieved. I understand that it is the wish of the House to speed up all this work. The House would also agree, however, that we do not want to alter works projects at the last moment. We must go through the planning stages to avoid waste and create proper control.

With that proviso, the Finance and Services Select Committee supports the various projects. In doing so, I hope that the Committee is acting not only as the watchdog of finance in the House, by trying to get good financial management, but as the supporter of improved services for Members to help them to carry out their parliamentary duties.

In common with other hon. Members, I hope that the House will agree to the motions.

9.51 pm

Mr. Bennett: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to one or two of the points that were made in the debate.

I always warn people that it is very dangerous when the House of Commons appears to be unanimous on something, because it means that trouble is afoot. We should be clear that, although a great deal of support for new services has been expressed by the hon. Members in the Chamber tonight, some of our colleagues are more cynical and sceptical about the proceedings. It is important that the enthusiasts should win those Members over.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) was a little unfair when he criticised the Executive for trying to slow the process down. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) was also a little unfair when he blamed officers of the House, because I think those individuals were won over to the benefits of change some time ago. It may be true that the Clerk at the Table is not waiting to punch the Votes and Proceedings of the House into a computer, but an awful lot of officers of the House see the benefits offered by new technology.

We should be clear that, in many ways, it is our colleagues who are the biggest problem. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) could tell us how difficult it occasionally is to persuade an hon. Member to move from one office to another. That is the major problem about the time scale. If everyone who spoke in the debate does his bit to persuade other hon. Members that putting up with a little inconvenience during a recess is worthwhile for the benefit of everyone else, we could make a great deal of progress.

I do not want to go into the technical issue of which cabling system should be used, but it is most important that the House keeps continually under review what is the most practical option. It is important that it considers the use of radio LAN because that could be a possibility for some parts of the building.

I do not think that I am leaking any information if I say that, on Monday, the Information Committee will be considering a report from the Department of the Official Report about the possibility of having the preceding five days' *Hansard* on the network. That would be very useful.

I should like to able to report to the House that the teething problems with POLIS 3 have been solved. Negotiations are going on in that respect and I hope that, by early next week, those will have been successful and progress will be made.

We shall have to return to the training issue. The more people want to be connected with Internet, the more important training will be.

The House must now make it clear to the country that we want to serve our constituents better. The network will give us the information to do our two key tasks—taking up constituents' problems and scrutinising the Executive—more effectively. I hope that the House will approve the motions tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the First Report from the Information Committee, on The Provision of a Parliamentary Data and Video Network (House of Commons Paper No. 237), and the First Report from the Committee of Session 1992-93, on The Provision of Members' Information Technology Equipment, Software and Services (House of Commons Paper No. 737).

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the recommendation contained in the First Report of the Broadcasting Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 323 of Session 1991-92, that a clean television feed of proceedings in the Chamber should be made available to Members in their Parliamentary offices on completion of the Parliamentary Data and Video Network; but endorses the Resolution of the Broadcasting Committee of 27th June, set out in the Minutes of Proceedings of the Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 533-i, that, in view of the information now available about the likely timetable for installing the network, work should be undertaken separately from the network with a view to supplying a clean feed to Members with offices in the Parliamentary outbuildings from the beginning of the 1994-95 Session, and thereafter as it becomes technically feasible in each outbuilding, with the aim of completing the process by the end of the Summer Recess of 1995, and that the House authorities should examine the scope for accelerating the provision of a similar facility to Members with offices in the Palace of Westminster, as part of the programme for establishing the network.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Landfill Site (Pitstone)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

9.55 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I welcome to this debate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), who shares the concerns that I am about to express.

My last Adjournment debate in the House was on new major roads in my constituency; the one before that was on gravel pits; and today's debate is on rubbish dumps. The Department of the Environment may feel a little besieged by my Adjournment debates, but many of my constituents feel that their villages are under siege.

I need only spell out the broad lines of the proposed landfill site near Pitstone in my constituency to show why its inhabitants feel threatened. The proposal is to infill a disused quarry close to half a dozen villages in an area of outstanding natural beauty with 500,000 tonnes of rubbish annually for 20 or more years. In any sane planning system, the Minister would rise to interrupt me at this point to say that my constituents can put their minds at rest and he and I can go home and get some sleep, because such a proposal is a self-evident non-starter.

I understand that the Minister is a keen cyclist. He would sleep all the more soundly in the knowledge that an area of outstanding natural beauty in the Chilterns will not be spoilt but will remain available for his and other people's recreation.

Sadly, however improbable the proposal may sound, that threat is real. Castle Cement Ltd., which used to operate a cement plant on the site, has made a formal application. The villages liable to be affected in some way are Pitstone, Ivinghoe, Bulbourne, Aldbury, Marsworth and Cheddington. Others will doubtless be added to the list. If the proposal goes through, I advise the Minister not to go cycling in the country lanes thereabouts, because he might be run down by a container truck carrying rubbish from his constituency of Ealing.

My constituents' fears will be familiar to the Minister: smell; traffic on small rural roads; damage to wild life; scavenging seagulls and rats; alongside numerous other unwanted bonuses that landfill sites tend to attract. The possible long-term pollution of the water table with leachate is another risk.

I know that there are complicated arguments about those matters and that Castle Cement has planned measures to deal with them. I have inspected its exhibition and know that it is a responsible company. But with so much volume going in over such a long period—3 per cent. of all the waste in south-east England—who can give guarantees? Is our knowledge so great that we can be sure what will happen over 20 years or more?

What is true of water is also true of land. We are told that the tipping will be of non-toxic waste, and I take that as true, but the Royal Society of Chemistry said:

"There is no completely satisfactory definition of contaminated land. In simple terms all land that contains substances above their natural concentration could be said to be contaminated."

Protest against the proposal has been widespread, intense and well informed. I start by giving the Minister an example from the Council for the Protection of Rural England. In its view:

"We do not accept that the risk inherent in the use of this site is acceptable. Landfill sites produce considerable quantities of leachate. While we accept that the quantities of leachate leaking into the underlying chalk"—

it is chalk that we are talking about here—

"may be virtually nil under perfect conditions, however, a failure of the containment system would alter that situation. It is clear from the literature and the experience of landfill operators that leachate generation is likely to continue over a very long period, even up to 70"—

Its being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope]*

Mr. Walden: I shall resume in the middle of the quotation, if I may:

"It is clear from the literature and the experience of landfill operators that leachate generation is likely to continue over a very long period, even up to 70 or 100 years. Such a lengthy time span could provide a considerable challenge to the integrity of the containment system."

That is the view of the CPRE.

Next, let me quote from the view of the Dacorum Environmental Forum, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West will be familiar:

"The Quarry sides have been carefully contoured during excavation to leave a naturalistic outline, on the basis that restoration would eventually take place at the worked-out level. This was assumed from the outset when quarrying was first permitted here in 1947, when the company was advised by the distinguished landscape architect (Sir) Geoffrey Jellicoe. There is no need to fill the Quarry in order to restore the land, as the exposed chalk can quickly regenerate as downland with minimal assistance. Landfill should not be regarded as a means of restoration but as an activity to be considered on its own merits; Pitstone Hill 'restored' to its approximate original contours is not necessarily better than Pitstone Hill restored with different contours, especially if the means of achieving the original outline is unacceptable on other grounds."

That seems to me an important and sophisticated rebuttal of what might otherwise be an obvious objection to the objectors—that filling in a quarry in the long term would be good for the environment.

Next, I shall quote yet another highly informed group of people—the Chiltern Society, whose views, as my right hon. Friend the Minister will agree when I have quoted them, cannot be regarded as amateur. I shall quote from the passage about gas and leachate:

"Intricate systems are proposed requiring methane flaring and pumping and storage construction adjacent to the B488, and to operate over a minimum of 20 and probably 50 years. The layout of the buildings compound is clumsy and the design of the buildings crude. These will be prominent in the view from the Ridgeway Path and Ivinghoe Hills and the proposed tree planting will do little to mitigate the effect. The vents of the gas extraction system will be discordant with the proposed contours and downland vegetation. It is not clear from documentation what form the vents will take or how high they will protrude from the ground, but they will be obtrusive. The sight, noise and smell of these operations, which cannot be screened from scarp slopes, will be intolerable. More fundamentally current geological opinion is that it is inevitable that a landfill such as that proposed will eventually contaminate/pollute the groundwater resource whether in 5, 10, 50 or more years from completion."

Finally, but not least, I have an objection from the Dunstable and District Boat Club. I emphasise to the Minister that it is an area of outstanding natural beauty, which people like to visit. Local people like to boat there. There are canals, and other people like to come and enjoy that facility. The boat club was formed more than 30 years ago, based on the Grand Union canal at Pitstone, has a membership of 80 people and their families, and has always taken an interest in local matters. Its members come from Leighton Buzzard, Luton, Dunstable, Eaton Bray,

[Mr. Walden]

Marsworth, Tring, Aylesbury, St. Albans and many other places. Here is another group of local people who are rightly and exceedingly concerned about what is proposed.

I have also had representations from the Beacon Villages Society, to the same broad effect. Perhaps the most heartfelt protest comes from Mrs. Cato, clerk to the parish council. She writes to tell me that the village has suffered the side effects of the cement works—dust, smell, traffic—for 50 years:

"For two and a half years Pitstone residents have experienced, many for the first time in their lives"—

since the cement works were discontinued—

"a normal rural atmosphere. Pitstone parish council considers that the dumping of rubbish in this quarry would be a blight on the neighbourhood. Just imagine the feelings of those villagers: if someone is banging your head against a wall, the relief when they stop is considerable. If they then start again, the pain is all the greater."

I hesitate to anticipate the Minister's speech, but naturally I am going to, anyway. I suspect that he will tell me that the proposals must go through the usual planning hoops, and I understand that, although I shall have more to say about it later. He may also tell me that the Environmental Protection Act 1990 did much to strengthen controls over the running of rubbish sites, and that the Government deserve credit for that.

The point, however, is that my constituents do not want 500,000 tonnes of rubbish on their doorsteps, however well managed the dumping may be. That brings me to my central point: a mass consumer society in one of the most densely populated countries in the world will always have problems with waste disposal. I understand that the Government are looking at possible ways of making incineration and recycling more attractive; but I greatly doubt whether anything will be done in time to save my constituents or the area of outstanding natural beauty in the Chiltern hills.

In this time of rethinking and of transition, as we look at new ways to minimise environmental damage, what must surely guide Government policy is a determination not to let new landfill sites which will blight people's lives for decades slip through the net. In particular, it should be a rule of thumb that no new landfill sites should be allowed close to inhabited areas. I proposed that in the environment debate of 1990, but it was not accepted.

Since then, the urgency has grown, as the Pitstone proposal shows. What future is there in shifting rubbish from one inhabited area and dumping it in another? We might as well leave it in the city centres and landfill the parks, because the area of outstanding natural beauty in the Chilterns is the local people's park, to which visitors are welcome. A massive dump there would scar not just the landscape but the villagers' lives for decades to come.

For 50 or more years, these people have put up with a cement works; now the people of Pitstone and the surrounding area have earned some environmental respite. For these and many other reasons, I ask the Minister to call in this application, for which request I know that I have the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones).

10.7 pm

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction (Sir George Young): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on securing the debate, and on representing so vividly the wholly understandable fears of his constituents.

Waste management is of great concern to my Department. I also know that my hon. Friend's remarks are of great interest to our hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), whom I see in his place. Part of the proposed landfill site is in his constituency.

My hon. Friend began by describing the proposals that have been put to the Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire county councils as waste planning authorities. They include a railhead, a container handling area and haul road, and the restoration of about 125 acres of chalk quarry by landfilling, mainly with household waste.

Part of the site lies within the metropolitan green belt and in the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty. The county council has sent us a copy of the application and of the developers' environmental appraisal, as the EC regulations on environmental assessment demand. A dozen or so local residents have written to us, but I suspect that most of those who recently attended my hon. Friend's public meeting are evidently saving their fire for the parties directly concerned.

Of course, the Department of the Environment may be directly concerned at some future date. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West has already asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to confirm that he will call in the application for his own decision. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham has now reinforced that request by asking again for the application to be called in. I have taken on board all the points that my hon. Friend has made this evening, and will consider the case for intervention as we would any other. At this stage, I suspect that my hon. Friend knows that I cannot say anything more.

Waste is an emotive subject. None of us likes it and the Government would like to see less of it. We would prefer to see it reduced at source—for example, less packaging where it serves no useful purpose. Then we want to encourage different ways of re-using or recycling it. Safe disposal is the last option, not the first. The Government will continue to fund research, advice and pilot projects for cutting down the amount of waste that has to be disposed of. Businesses, the waste industry and individual households can all contribute.

In that sense, as my hon. Friend pointed out, we are all polluters, and many of the answers lie in our own hands. But initiatives to encourage reduction, re-use, recycling or energy recovery will never be able to deal with all our waste. There will continue to be a need for facilities for final disposal at landfill sites.

The Government's objective is to minimise pollution at such sites and prevent harm to the environment. Landfill is not inconsistent with sustainability if it is properly managed and controlled. Landfill sites have often been developed in the holes, or voids, as the technical term is, that are left by mineral workings. In the longer term, the restoration of old mineral workings can produce a pleasanter environment for everyone to enjoy.

In those cases where planning permission is given for landfill operations, the planning authority will often want to impose conditions or obligations. The phasing of tipping and restoration work, the hours of operation, the standards

and specification for restoring the site can all be controlled. In that way, much can be done to reduce the impact on local people. Of course, landfill operations are also subject to legislation on the control of pollution. As my hon. Friend pointed out, we have fairly recently introduced an enhanced system of waste management licensing, which provides rigorous controls over pollution from landfill sites and other waste facilities.

But with all those safeguards, it remains the case, as my hon. Friend said, that landfill sites are not the most popular of neighbours. Where then should they go? The Government support the proximity principle, under which waste should be disposed of or otherwise managed close to the point where it is generated. That tends to create a more responsible and therefore sustainable approach to generating waste. It should also limit pollution from transport.

Where waste cannot be disposed of reasonably close to its source, the use of rail or water transport is desirable if it reduces the overall environmental impact and would be economically feasible.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a railway siding leads into the site which, according to the application, it is not proposed to use? That seems strange.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to point out that close to the site there is a railway line, and I understand that part of the application is for a railhead. Those are the sort of relevant factors about which, in the first instance, Buckingham county council will want to make inquiries.

On the time scale, which may be of interest to my hon. Friends, the Department would usually begin to take a decision on that round about August or September. Much depends on whether the local planning authority takes the view that this is a departure from the structure plan and, if it is, whether it wishes to support it. That is the sort of dialogue that needs to take place in the short term before my Department takes a decision on whether to call it in.

On the question of proximity, there is no fixed definition, and it will vary according to the circumstances. But it should result in most of our waste being disposed of in the region where it is generated. Movement across regional boundaries is not prevented, and may make good sense in some areas, but each region should expect to provide sufficient facilities to treat or dispose of all its waste.

Suitable disposal sites in the south-east are not evenly spread. Availability in the London area is particularly limited, while some surrounding counties, of which Buckinghamshire is one, have geological conditions particularly suited to landfill. My Department's regional planning guidance recognises that those areas can be used to meet regional needs.

My hon. Friend referred to the prospect that waste from developed countries such as France and Germany might end up being landfilled in the United Kingdom. The Government hold firmly to the view, which I am sure my hon. Friend endorses, that countries that have or should be capable of acquiring the capacity to deal with their own waste should not send it to the UK for final disposal.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) indicated in his statement on 15 June, in future the presumption will be that waste should not be imported for final disposal in this country. That accords with Government policy of self-sufficiency in the final disposal of waste, and that principle is enshrined in the Basle convention and EC waste shipment regulations.

Provision for the management of home-grown waste must be planned—it will not just happen. County councils are the waste regulation authorities as well as the waste planning authorities. In that role, they are required to draw up waste disposal plans under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Those plans cover the type, quantity and origin of waste to be disposed of in the plan area but they do not identify specific sites or criteria for new facilities.

That matter is for the land use planning system, which aims to secure the most efficient and effective use of land in the public interest. That system is led by the development plan. Those plans should provide the framework for the development and use of land in an area. They should reflect local choices but also take on board national and regional policies.

Mr. Walden: I referred to my previous Adjournment debates on roads and gravel pits in my constituency. Slightly to my surprise, the roads proposal was withdrawn. I presumed that a lot of strategic thinking had gone into it, but I discovered that one reason for that proposal being withdrawn was that those concerned wanted to do some strategic thinking. I was gratified by the withdrawal, but surprised to learn that strategic thinking came after the strategic decision.

More or less the same thing occurred in respect of a gravel pit project, which I was told was part of a necessary future plan drawn up by the council, county council, industry and Government. It was found that the future demand for gravel had been grossly overestimated, so the project did not proceed.

I have enormous confidence in my hon. Friend personally, but I am a little less confident in future planning on the grand scale—particularly having lived some of my life in communist countries. Has the Department of the Environment really thought through future demand for landfill sites? I heard my hon. Friend refer to Buckinghamshire as a rather favoured area for that sort of disposal.

Sir George Young: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's expression of confidence in my judgment. I am sure that there are people in Buckinghamshire county council who take the same objective approach. I tried to describe Government policy in general terms—it is to reduce the volume of waste generated using a whole range of measures. Ultimately, we rely on planning authorities—county councils, in this instance—to identify specific sites or criteria for new facilities. It is a land use planning matter, and those authorities are best placed to identify those parts of their counties that are best suited for that function.

The Department has an overall role, which my hon. Friend invited me to use, in calling in plans. That is an option, but by and large we prefer to let the planning system be run by local people. We have a devolved planning system, and the presumption is that it should work. There is a safety valve in the ability to call in projects if they raise matters of national or regional importance or are departures.

My Department will closely monitor between now and September the further inquiries made by the county

[Sir George Young]

council, whether it takes the view that the proposal is a departure, makes any request to the Department and other relevant factors.

There must be strong reasons for taking a planning decision away from the local authority. My hon. Friend spoke of his experiences under totalitarian regimes. One feature of such regimes is that they tend to be rather centralist, and we want to avoid that if possible.

I think that decisions of this kind should be made at local level, because in total they affect every aspect of local life. As I said, the Secretary of State's powers to call in applications for his own decision are used somewhat selectively, usually because a case raises issues of more than local importance.

My hon. Friend has made clear his view that new rubbish dumps—to use his phrase—should never be created near inhabited areas. Nearness to housing and other developments, and the impact on the quality of life of local people, are considerations that the planning authority may wish to take into account; but each case for new or extended waste disposal facilities should be considered on its merits within the development plan context.

It may be necessary for the planning authority to balance the shorter-term impact on local communities with any projected benefits. There are many factors to take into account, including the geology and hydro-geology of the site, how access would be gained, the nature of the landscape and the length of the project.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend referred to the shorter term. When the subject arose at a local meeting, a rather excited participant responded to the information that the longer-term benefits would be seen after 20 years or more by saying that, in the longer term, we are all dead.

Sir George Young: I have read accounts of that lively public meeting, which my hon. Friend attended. I understand that representatives of the applicant considered it in their interests not to attend. Of course, we must balance the short to medium-term impact on local communities with any projected benefits.

There are no simple answers to the problem of coping with waste. The community as a whole needs these facilities, but individual communities do not want them close at hand. I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents are already making their views known to Buckinghamshire county council. As I said at the beginning, we will keep in close touch with progress; we have noted what my hon. Friend said, we have the representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West, and my Department stands ready to intervene if such a course is justified.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 1 July 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Executions (First World War)

9.35 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): It is my privilege to present to this honourable House a petition signed by more than 25,000 people, in particular Janet Booth, who is the granddaughter of Harry Farr of the West Yorkshire Regiment, Allan Harris, the nephew of Private Louis Harris of the West Yorkshire Regiment and Grace Shoan, niece of Private Bertie McCubbin of the Sherwood Foresters.

Those individuals, together with the other 25,000 petitioners, wish to draw the House's attention to the fact that, in the great war of 1914-19, more than 300 soldiers of the British empire were executed at dawn by firing squad, having been found guilty of offences that included cowardice, desertion, disobedience, sleeping at post, throwing away arms and striking a superior officer.

The petitioners believe that those men were denied fair trials in accordance with the rules of natural justice and note that documents now available prove that many were suffering from sickness and trauma. They say:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House introduce legislation to grant posthumous pardons to each of these men and that their names shall be included in all official records and memorials to the esteemed soldiers of the Empire Forces who fought bravely and made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, in the cause of freedom and justice.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Ex-service People

9.37 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I beg to move,

That this House, mindful of the increasing needs of the United Kingdom's ageing ex-service population and the many problems of younger members of the ex-service community in direct consequence of "Options for Change", considers that there is now a pressing need for a sub-Department of Ex-Service Affairs within an existing Ministry and with a designated Minister to be responsible, as the only fundamental and long-term solution for the care and welfare of ex-service people and their dependants; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government now to respond positively to the Royal British Legion's urgent call for a sub-department to be established.

It is a privilege and an honour to present this motion, the principal author of which is my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and his friends in the Royal British Legion. I am pleased to declare that I am an associate member of the legion.

The motion calls for the appointment of a Minister with special responsibilities to look after the interests of ex-service men and women. It draws attention to the care that those men and women, who gave diligent, gallant and brave service to this country in our armed forces for many years, now need. It is a timely request. I know that other hon. Members have sought to draw attention to the need for such a Minister, and I look forward to hearing them later.

My constituency is rich in organisations that endeavour to promote and protect the interests of ex-service people. I hope that I will be forgiven for referring to Andy Finn and Charles Mercer of my local branch of the Royal Naval Association; John Webb and John Bright of the Royal British Legion; and Councillor Sid Joslin of the Royal Air Forces Association, who have all encouraged me to promote the motion this morning.

Many more hon. Members would have liked to be present this morning. In fairness to them, it should be recorded that Friday is an extraordinarily difficult day for hon. Members to be in the House, as many have long-standing constituency interests. I am anxious that anyone who reads the *Official Report* should understand that many hon. Members from both sides of the House wish to be associated with the motion, although unable to be here today. They will no doubt tell the Prime Minister in their own way, either by writing or informally, that they agree that it is time that a Minister dedicated to the interests of ex-service people was appointed.

At school, I was a dilatory pupil, in some ways unhappy. Every week, one of our tutors would insist that we learn some lines of Hilaire Belloc, which did not stimulate me a bit, and I was ritually admonished, much to my embarrassment and discomfiture.

But on one occasion he set us some lines of Sir Winston Churchill. Unbeknown to him, I had studied the speeches of Sir Winston Churchill. Indeed, I knew them rather well. When he came in the classroom hoping to do his usual stuff and cause me discomfiture, he called me to the front and said, "Proceed, Mackinlay." To his surprise and a round of applause from my fellow pupils, I recited the lines which, if the House will allow me, I shall quote again this morning:

"The gratitude of every home in our island, in the Empire and, indeed, throughout the world—except in the abodes of the guilty—goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by the odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

turning the tide of this war by their prowess and devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Although those words are jealously guarded as a memorial to the gallant fighters of the Royal Air Force, half a century on they could refer to a larger number of people. The gratitude of many that is owed to the few must mean my generation, who were born after the second world war and are the beneficiaries of the sacrifice of millions of men and women during the great conflict of 1939 to 1945. "The few" are my parents' generation, not just RAF pilots but all those who fought in all the theatres of war in the cause of justice and freedom.

This motion is addressed primarily on behalf of, but not exclusively to, those millions of people. If the Government are persuaded to appoint such a Minister, he or she will be responsible for those people. Ex-service men and women who served in previous conflicts need the support of a dedicated Minister. A few thousand soldiers who served in the great war are still alive, as are many of the widows of those who served.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose—*

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North) *rose—*

Mr. Mackinlay: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Ealing, North first.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman is most generous, and I congratulate him on initiating this debate. He was right to recite the superb words of Sir Winston Churchill in the greatest speech in the history of this land, but he should not forget the value of Hilaire Belloc. Perhaps we can have a word about that afterwards.

Sir Winston Churchill spoke of "the few". The central point is that those few are a diminishing band. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will give a friendly nod in favour of the motion. The newly appointed Minister will have a diminishing responsibility, but it should be discharged. All my British Legion friends—I am vice-president of the Greenford branch of the Royal British Legion and its Royal Naval section—strongly support what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I am sure that the House will support it.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He and I have often spoken privately about our mutual interest in Polish ex-service men, of whom he represents a large number. It is important to recall that about one in seven of the German aircraft shot down over London were shot down by brave Polish pilots, some of whom still reside in the United Kingdom, having made it their home.

Although they are now in the evening of life with their British grandchildren around them, in the intervening 50 years their interests have not always been satisfactorily safeguarded. For instance, whereas other British service men have had extensive opportunities to appeal against refusals for benefits, it has been much more difficult for Polish ex-service men to do so.

If a Minister were appointed, he or she could deal with the interests of Polish ex-service men who are now inextricably bound up with the United Kingdom, having made it their home. That group must not be forgotten. A debate like this could inadvertently offend other groups by not referring to them, but I acknowledge the debt of gratitude which this country owes to the Polish ex-service men who fought alongside colleagues in the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Heald: Although we all agree that "the few" gave much service to this country, will the hon. Gentleman explain the purpose of a new Minister? Existing ministries already deal with housing and employment, and war pensions are dealt with by a separate Department. What would a new Minister do?

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman is somewhat impatient. I am just warming up, although some hon. Members will be anxious about the volume of papers that I have with me. I shall deal with the matter as swiftly as I can, and come to the central issue of the Minister in a few moments. The hon. Gentleman prompts me to say that the United Kingdom is the exception among our principal allies in not having a Minister directly charged with promoting the interests of ex-service people. The United States has a considerable veterans' organisation. As recently as 1989, President Bush raised the post to the level of Cabinet Secretary, and that importance has been sustained by President Clinton.

Mr. Heald: I am sorry to trespass on the hon. Gentleman's good will, but the position in America is different. There, the Veterans Administration deals with the health service for veterans and is the only means of delivering health care to veterans. This country has a national health service, so such a Minister is not needed.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman is impatient, and should wait to hear me out. It is true that, in America, the Veterans Administration deals with health and welfare, but not exclusively—it promotes the wider interests of ex-service people and their dependants, who are entitled to a voice. They are people who have made great sacrifices.

I notice that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) is of my generation—he and I should tread cautiously—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is younger."] In that case, he should tread even more cautiously when pontificating on the subject.

I wish to deal with the important subject of comparable Ministers in other countries.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I want to support him and ask for his comments. The call for a Minister is warmly supported by the Royal British Legion branches. My constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green is privileged to have three branches: Muswell Hill, Hornsey and Wood Green, and I am proud to be an associate member of the legion. I received a letter from the Wood Green branch of the Royal British Legion this week and I should like my hon. Friend's views on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. This is an intervention. I am sure that the hon. Lady can catch my eye later, but it is not appropriate to quote from a letter in an intervention.

Mr. Mackinlay: I shall look forward to reading my hon. Friend's letter, and will write to her branch of the Royal British Legion to say how much I appreciate its support for my motion.

Mrs. Roche: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: I think that this will have to be the last time that I give way for a wee while.

Mrs. Roche *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Lady is not about to quote from a letter in her intervention.

Mrs. Roche: Absolutely not. I wanted to emphasise that British Legion branches in my constituency and elsewhere are stating that it is particularly hard for them at this difficult time and it is even more important that there should be a Minister to meet their needs. We should take the point that the British Legion makes, which I am sure will have been reinforced by letters to many hon. Members.

Mr. Mackinlay: I want to pick up the theme of what happens in other allied countries, and mention Canada and Australia. However, before I do so, I wish to stress that, in the United States and other countries, the need exists for a Minister who can cut through red tape in Whitehall, and in other countries' equivalent of Whitehall, to assist the ex-service organisations that campaign for individual and collective interests.

One of the arguments forcibly advanced by the Royal British Legion and other ex-service organisations is that Whitehall has a plethora of agencies—about 17 or 18—and a host of Departments and Ministers with which they have to deal to obtain redress for their members. We want to break through that bureaucracy, and a designated Minister could do that—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North must contain himself.

There are plenty of precedents in Whitehall. We have had a Minister for Sport for some time, but for the first decade or more of the post's existence, there was no official portfolio. The portfolio was originally held by a junior Minister in the former Ministry of Housing and Local Government, then the Department of the Environment, then the Department of Education and Science. It now resides in the tranquil waters of the National Heritage Department. I was told just the other evening that there are now red dispatch boxes with the words "Minister for Sport" on them.

Before the formal post of Minister for Sport existed, various Prime Ministers said that a Minister would be given responsibility for promoting sport and would intervene in Departments and agencies to that end. That worked well and, after a time, the Minister for Sport became a designated post.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his speech. I have great sympathy for the motion. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire branch of the British Legion has made many representations to me expressing support for the motion.

Could the hon. Gentleman help me to understand the concept of the Minister? At present, the responsibility for service men's affairs is spread across different Departments that specialise in individual problems. I fear that, if the affairs are run through one Minister, bottlenecks and delays may occur. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can reassure me that that will not be the case.

I would appreciate it if the hon. Gentleman would also touch on the subject of cost. I should not want the excessive costs of a new Minister to take funds from other Departments that already deal with ex-service men's affairs.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Lady has made three points. I do not think that cost should be of paramount importance when considering ex-service men and women, but in any event I believe that the post will provide a marginal saving. Many costs are incurred by voluntary organisations and Government Departments because the responsibility is fractured between various Government Departments and agencies.

A dedicated Minister would be able to cut through the red tape and diminish costs and time, which is vital to people in the evening of life or who are in pain and discomfort. Costs should not be of paramount importance, but, as the hon. Lady has raised the subject, I have to say that I believe that a dedicated Minister would probably bring savings. I believe that I have covered the point that the hon. Lady made about efficiency.

When I tabled the motion, I received an unsolicited telephone call from the office of the Government's Chief Whip. I was asked which Minister I thought should reply to the debate. I was a little surprised by the request, and said that I thought that the Minister should come from the Ministry of Defence. The clerk replied that a representative from the Ministry of Defence had already stated that it was not its responsibility to reply.

I said that the only person who could help was the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had previously been asked about the subject by a number of hon. Members, including myself. The Prime Minister said—in fairness to the present Prime Minister, it was also said by his predecessors—that the matter was adequately dealt across a range of Departments and Ministers. That story shows that it is not clear who should have responsibility for ex-service people's affairs.

I am pleased to see that good sense has prevailed and there is a distinguished Minister on the Treasury Bench this morning—the Minister of State for Defence Procurement —who I know will give us the benefit of his views later. The Minister is always kind and courteous, and I know that he takes a great interest in the subject.

However, he is a little hindered, as he cannot deliver the goods this morning. If the mood of the House is in favour of at least asking the Prime Minister to reconsider the subject, I hope that he will pass on that fact at an early opportunity next week, probably in advance of the expected Government reshuffle. I hope that he will tell the Prime Minister that he should consider the subject.

The British Legion has said that its members are frustrated. I have three examples of the sort of problems encountered in the agencies in Whitehall and elsewhere. One ex-service man was medically discharged, suffering from a psychiatric problem—he had been disabled by a toxic aerosol that poisoned him during an exercise in Canada. As a result, he had to contact the Department of Social Security to claim a war pension, and the Benefits Agency to claim income support and disabled living allowance. He probably has further entitlements under the war pension scheme that the British Legion need to pursue on his behalf. He has been advised to claim sickness benefit from his local benefits agency, which should have been awarded to him on his discharge from the Army. However, it was not until he received the advice of the British Legion that the matter was pursued on his behalf.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

A former royal marine eventually received a war pension of 20 per cent. for noise-induced hearing loss. When he contacted the legion, it was revealed that he was also suffering injuries to his knees and had osteoarthritis in other parts of his body. Because the British Legion championed his interests, he is now in receipt of a 90 per cent. war pension. A war pensioner's mobility supplement is also being considered, along with a constant attendance allowance. He has also received a grant from the DSS to enable him to purchase a special chair under the home adaptations grant scheme for war pensioners.

However, one wonders what would have happened if he had not come into contact with the legion, and whether he could have achieved these benefits much earlier had there been a dedicated Minister who was alive to his interests. If he had gone to the legion in those circumstances, it would have had to bang on the door of only one Ministry.

The final case concerns a man who had given 28 years' service in the forces. He left with no form of discharge procedure or medical board, but it was known that he had a hearing disability. On leaving the service, he was put in touch with the war pensions directorate, through the local DSS office, and was ultimately given a gratuity for noise-induced deafness, which it was accepted he had incurred during his years of service.

Following legal advice, he got a 30 per cent. war pension, although his legal costs were considerable. As a former service man, he had no knowledge of civil systems; he was fortunate to achieve that much, but without the advice of the legion he would never have got that far. The legion has now been able to obtain more for him, including a 50 per cent. war pension and an allowance for a lowered standard of occupation.

This again shows the need for a central point where information would be available to help former service people with their needs.

I return to the question of what happens elsewhere. I was pleased yesterday to receive some information from Australia, from the Veterans Affairs Minister, Mr. Con Sciacca, who says that his portfolio is in the Department of Defence. Similarly, our colleagues in the Canadian Parliament have two Ministers dedicated to veterans affairs, with Privy Council status. So there are easy comparisons to be made with other Westminster-style constitutions. Those Ministers fulfil all the duties that I have tried to outline this morning.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Royal British Legion in Burnley thinks that we lag not only behind our allies but also, tragically, behind some of our former enemies? That causes the legion even more distress.

Mr. Mackinlay: Absolutely. When preparing for this morning's debate, I studied an amendment once tabled by the former Member for Hastings and Rye, Mr. Ken Warren —[HON. MEMBERS: "Sir Ken Warren."] Yes, of parachutist fame, I believe. His amendment drew attention to the fact that the pensions and benefits paid to former service people and widows in Germany and Japan were far superior to those paid here. I therefore endorse what my hon. Friend says.

When I go the Library to ask how many early-day motions relating to former service people have been tabled by hon. Members, I realise how many of them, on both sides of the House, take an interest.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his initiative, which I know is much appreciated by members of the Royal British Legion. I know that he will be pleased to learn the position of the official Opposition on this. We accept the need for much greater co-ordination between the parts of Whitehall that impact on the needs of our service men and women, and we are actively considering setting up a special unit in the MOD to look after their needs.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is excellent news. In a way, I am addressing my remarks today to the Prime Minister, but there could be a change of Government at some stage, and I hope that the leader of a Labour Administration would act on what I have said. In any event I am greatly encouraged by my hon. Friend's remarks. Meanwhile, I invite hon. Members to study carefully some of the early-day motions to which I have referred.

I suspect that the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) may want to mention this subject later, but I was recently privileged to visit Ards borough council in Northern Ireland, where I made many friends in the community. Recently, the council was invited by the Belgian authorities to send some veterans this autumn to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the liberation of a number of Belgian towns—a liberation effected chiefly by a Polish contingent and regiments from Northern Ireland. There was cross-party support in Ards borough council to pay for the veterans' trip, and the hospitality in Belgium was to be paid for by the Belgian authorities.

Unfortunately, the Northern Ireland district auditor waved his red card, so to speak, and said that he would not approve of the expenditure. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and I have written to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the matter. I hope that it can be resolved, but it goes to show that there is an awful lot of red tape. There is always some Blimp who can frustrate things. A Ministry of the type that I propose would provide a one-stop shop for Ards borough council and the other veterans' organisations in Northern Ireland —and for hon. Members who want such cases sorted out. What has happened to Ards was clearly absurd, and it must be remedied with dispatch.

Last week, a report was published by an organisation known as Crisis. Entitled "Working for Homeless People", it drew attention to the plight of the homeless in London. There has been some dispute about the report's figures, which suggested that as many as one in four single homeless people in London were former service men.

I do not want to argue the statistics this morning; it is irrelevant whether one in four or one in six is the operative figure. But it is a demonstrable fact that a high proportion of these people are former service men. My anxiety is prompted by the fact that, with the downsizing of our armed forces and all the implications of "Options for Change", many men and women who joined the armed forces as adolescents and to whom the services have been family and friend will, for the first time in their lives, find themselves alone, without homes or companionship.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Speaking as a vice-president of Crisis, formerly known as

Crisis at Christmas, can I assure my hon. Friend and the whole House that the report to which he referred was at once carefully researched and well documented? It was also looked at very carefully and with some concern by the former service community and its organisations.

Mr. Mackinlay: Absolutely right. We all have a duty to be alive to the interests of service men and women, and to safeguard those interests when they leave the armed forces, to ensure that homelessness among this group does not grow. We must bring our energies and resources to bear to ensure that the number of homeless former service men and women is reduced.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): I am with the hon. Gentleman on that point, and wish to raise an issue of profound importance to one of my constituents. With your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to speak about it in this intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair cannot allow that indulgence. There is plenty of time for proper contributions. Interventions should be short and to the point. No quotations or long examples should be given.

Mr. Sykes: I will attempt to make my intervention as short as possible. It concerns an RAF widow whose husband, a sergeant, died after 20 years' service to his country. She and her children are about to be thrown on the street because, under the Ministry of Defence system, an ex-service man's widow has no right to occupy or buy the home. However, four MOD civil servants have exercised their rights on the same estate.

Will the hon. Gentleman compare that with the astronomical sums awarded to ex-service women who got themselves pregnant, and the fact that some individuals in the MOD seem concerned to prosecute Falklands service men who fought for their country? Is that not a scandalous state of affairs?

Mr. Mackinlay: If we had a Minister for ex-service affairs, the hon. Member would have a focal point to allow him to raise that issue. There is no Question Time dedicated to such matters, either. Although I do not go along with the broad thrust of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, he should have the right to raise the matter in the House with an appropriate Minister at Question Time. The hon. Gentleman could then argue his corner. As sure as night turns into day, the parliamentary calendar would then include a half-day—I hope, a whole day—each year to debate ex-service issues.

I give way to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), who gave service to his country in the armed forces.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): The hon. Gentleman said that homeless ex-service people had been part of a family, and that it was tragic that they should thereafter become homeless. The hon. Gentleman should never forget that they remain part of that family after they leave it.

I can talk only about airborne forces, but I know of one case of an ex-guardsman. The first port of call for anyone who has left the services with a problem must be the family —back to the regiment and through it, to the Royal British Legion. It follows that he will be directed by the legion and his regimental association to the right help. If I have dealt with one case in the past 20 years, I have dealt with 30 or 40 ex-parachutists who came to me as their first port of call. Safety nets exist, but those who drop through them ought to know—and they do know before they leave the services—that they exist.

Mr. Mackinlay: I absolutely agree, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman's intervention will attract attention. There is a problem with communicating with people, who, by definition, are lonely and have no fixed abode. I know that every right hon. and hon. Member would take the same initiative as the hon. Gentleman, in steering ex-service people in emotional, physical or financial difficulty towards their former regiment or equivalent Royal Air Force or Royal Navy unit and on to the appropriate ex-service organisation.

Incidentally, I stress that all my comments include our gallant friends who served in conflicts in the Merchant Navy. They are definitely included—as are, to some extent, members of other uniformed services who took part in the 1939-45 war effort in particular.

Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House have signed early-day motions and pressed Ministers in respect of former prisoners of war. Lord Braine, the former Member of Parliament for Castle Point, was vigorous and vocal on behalf of people who were incarcerated in Japanese prisoner of war camps, who he considers have not received justice or a proper remedy. I was pleased to support a related early-day motion tabled in the last session by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff), which attracted support from all parts of the House.

One of my constituents, John Stevens, served on HMS Gloucester, which was sunk in the battle of Crete. He was one of the few survivors, and was marched across central Europe to somewhere in Poland, where he claims—I believe with some legitimacy—that he was not treated in accordance with the Geneva convention. He was required by the Farben chemical corporation, along with the Hitler regime, to help the German war machine, contrary to the convention's provisions. He suffered physical and emotional hardship, and has tried to pursue his case and that of his colleagues with various Government Departments.

Part of the problem for people engaged in such campaigns is that they do not have a one-stop shop or a Minister who will listen. I am not necessarily saying that the Minister would agree with all such campaigns and claims, but it is difficult to get such problems examined at a senior level in Whitehall.

A similar situation exists in respect of British nuclear test veterans. By coincidence, their chairman—a Paisley councillor—is named Ken McGinley. I am sure that they would want to be mentioned in this debate, because they are frustrated by their inability to have someone at senior level acknowledge their case and properly consider their claim for compensation.

I was privileged to join a number of hon. Members at the deeply moving ceremonies in Normandy a few weeks ago. I place on record my congratulations to the Minister in another place, Viscount Cranborne, and his colleagues on the way in which those ceremonies were conducted. They were profoundly moving, and something that I will always remember.

Previously, there was misunderstanding—I apportion no blame—between some individuals in Whitehall and ex-service organisations. It all turned out right on the day,

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but that initial misunderstanding could have been avoided if there had been a veterans Minister with responsibility for service affairs. He or she would have been sensitive from the outset to the aspirations and interests of ex-service people.

Concern has been expressed on both sides of the House about the reduced grant to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I believe that the Government have seen the amber light—frankly, right hon. and hon. Members do not like that cut. We were told by the Secretary of State for Defence that the commission can absorb that cut, and that it will not create any problems. However, that situation should be watched.

If there were someone in Whitehall conscious of such matters, that cut might not have been made, and the Government could be counselled against making any further cuts in a service that is much valued and appreciated by ex-service men and women, their widows and dependants, and people generally who are proud of this country and of the service that it was given in years past by brave service men.

I am disappointed that the Government failed to recommend to the sovereign that an official medal be struck and awarded for the millions of people who did national service. The Royal British Legion has produced its own fine medal, but ex-national service men and women who now serve in the various uniformed services—police, ambulance and fire brigade—are not, strictly speaking, permitted to wear the legion medal on their uniforms on appropriate occasions.

That is a pity; it also strikes me as daft and insensitive. Why on earth should we not recognise people who are proud of having done national service? They may not all have been up to their necks in muck and bullets, but they did their best, and they are proud of it. I hope that the Minister will think again, because millions of ex-national service men would be profoundly appreciative.

I apologise for having spoken at some length, but I have tried to give way to interventions and to reassure people that I am arguing not for a Ministry, but for a Minister. I do not care whether the Minister concerned is actually in the Ministry of Defence, perhaps also charged with buying dreadnoughts, in the Department of Social Security perhaps also issuing giro cheques or in the Privy Council Office in Downing street.

That does not matter; what we want is a Minister for veterans or ex-service men and women, and I suspect that, once appointed, such a Minister would be greatly valued. After a while, people will wonder how things worked without such a post—which, after a while, would find an appropriate home in one of the Ministries, as have the Minister for Sport and the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People.

I hope that today's debate will persuade the Prime Minister to acknowledge the views of numerous Members of Parliament—some of whom are legitimately unable to be present—and, above all, the views of all those in the ex-service organisations who would like recognition of the service that their members have given, and the sacrifices made by their comrades-in-arms who, although now deceased, have left widows and dependants.

10.21 am

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): I warmly thank the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for all that he has done to support the Royal British Legion over the years, and for giving me—a virtual new boy in its counsels—such wise guidance.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has cited as one of his main interests studying the battlefields of the first world war. Today, however, he has shown that his support and enthusiasm for our armed forces past, present and, indeed, future—for we are considering the future as much as the past—go far beyond that. I am cautious by nature, and I approach the subject with caution as well as enthusiasm. Anyone who believes that we could wave a wand tomorrow and appoint a Minister, and that then all the problems of ex-service men would be solved, is living in cloud cuckoo land. Let us think carefully about this, and go about it in the right way.

As the hon. Member mentioned in both his speech and his petition—I am not sure that I can go all the way with the petition—we are considering between 18,000 and 20,000 people who fought in the first world war and who are still alive, plus their dependants. Those dependants are very vulnerable, and often find themselves completely lost when left alone. Inevitably, and in a sense sadly, they are a decreasing problem. Then there are those who served in the second world war: no one can say exactly how many uniformed men and women served in that war, but there may have been as many as 8 million. Finally, there are the national service men, and regulars who have left or are now leaving the armed forces.

As the hon. Member for Thurrock pointed out, those people have been part of a family structure that has given both discipline and dependence. When they leave the forces, they are sometimes pretty vulnerable—far more vulnerable than people who have led entirely civilian lives, and know their way around.

I should declare an interest: I am a former service man. I joined the Army at 16, and served as a regular for some 14 years. I thought that it might be sensible to toughen up a bit in preparation for joining the Army, so I found work in a scrap metal yard. In those days, there were no forklift trucks; we had bagging hats and bagging hooks. I would climb up the side of my lorry with my bagging hat and hook and a hundredweight and a half of scrap, while two chaps waited below to put another load on.

I was paid the princely sum of £5 a week in that job. It was quite a shock to leave—admittedly, it was a 12-hour day—and to go into the armed forces, where my pay immediately dropped to 14 shillings a week. A year later, when I was commissioned, I found myself on 14 shillings a day. That was still less than what I would have been paid if I had stayed in the scrap metal yard—and I probably could have wangled it to remain there in a reserved occupation; my post-war credits would have built up. I missed out on that, and served—but that is exactly what I wanted to do.

Now I am president of my local branch of the Royal British Legion: the Beaminster branch, which, as my hon. Friend the Minister will know, is without doubt the finest branch in the United Kingdom. I hope that he will pay appropriate tribute to it when he winds up. *[Interruption.]* Views may differ, but I am better qualified than others to judge because of my former service.

I am full of the same enthusiasm as the hon. Member for Thurrock, but I understand the fears that exist in government. It is a little easier for the Opposition to say, "This is what we will do," but we need a firm pledge. The Royal British Legion is exerting pressure on the Government—rightly, in my view—but, as I have said, fears exist. We must ask ourselves first whether a direct Ministry involvement of this kind is really needed. I believe that it is, as does the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, who has vast experience of dealing with the Royal British Legion in government as well as in opposition.

There is sometimes a lack of co-ordination between the 17 Departments which operate in this area. However, anyone who thinks that the work of 17 Departments can be drawn together in one sub-office of a Ministry is living in cloud cuckoo land; and that is not what we propose. We want to improve the work that is done in those Departments, and to co-ordinate it on occasions when co-ordination is necessary. As has been said, such a sub-Department could even save money, as things would be done more quickly.

If we accept that the need exists, we must then ask how it can best be met. A low-key system and a responsible Minister are necessary, as is a sub-office. Most crucially, we need what I would describe as an expediter who will ensure that matters are dealt with quickly, rather than an imperious Minister—not that Ministers are ever imperious, of course, but we do not want a Minister surrounded by a huge staff.

All Back Benchers—indeed, all Members of Parliament —should be aware of one possible problem. As soon as there is a designated Minister for veterans, a large number of people might bypass their local Member of Parliament. I hope and expect that all ex-service men in my constituency will write to me in the first instance asking me to deal with their problems; the last thing I want is for them to write directly to the Minister for ex-service men and ignore their Member of Parliament. That is my concern, and it must be met.

The right channel must be, first, to the Member of Parliament, who would then pass the problem to the sub-office for it then to be dealt with by other Departments. I would be extremely upset if the Minister for the sub-office wrote to me to say that he had received a letter from one of my constituents—not least because of the extra delay involved.

One must accept that a key role should be played by the Royal British Legion, which has field officers in almost every county. The Legion made it clear in discussions with the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and myself that it wanted to be involved and to be part of a partnership. It does not want the operation to be conducted exclusively by the Government, but equally, it does not want to tell the Government what they should do. It wants to set the scene, and then say to the Government, "You do what is right."

When I first became involved in this matter, one or two of my hon. Friends, who, I am pleased to say, are not here today, seized me by the scruff of the neck and said, "How dare you suggest that the sub-Department, or whatever it may be called, should be based in the Ministry of Defence? It must be based in the Department of Social Security, where it rightly belongs." The Royal British Legion hasa now made it quite clear that it is not its job to say how all this should be constructed or which Ministry should be involved: that is for the Government to decide.

As a former service man, I want the office to be based in the Ministry of Defence, which can pass matters on to social services if it wants to. Tribute has rightly been paid to the MOD, and to 3 Division in particular, for organising the marvellous events in Normandy. No other Department has the same skills and organisational ability or the same care and concern for ex-service men. I therefore hope that the office will be based in the MOD.

Over the years, another matter has concerned me. I have never liked bilateral discussions, whereby one obtains a version of what has been said by one person to another but discussions are never drawn together as a whole.

I have suggested to the officers of the Royal British Legion that we have reached the stage where we should stop having bilateral discussions and that, in the next month, a meeting should be held with advisers—I do not suggest that we want to meet three or four Ministers—from the Department of Social Security, the MOD and the policy unit at No. 10. They should sit down with the Royal British Legion to hear its sensible views and the role that it wants to play. I have also suggested that the RBL should second someone to work within a sub-unit under a Minister. I hope that my hon. Friend will aot on both those proposals.

None of us wants to threaten Ministers, because that is the wrong way in which to go about things. Early-day motion 60 has been signed by 210 hon. Members. In another few weeks, the number may rise to 250. This issue will not go away over the summer recess. On the first day of the new Session, we shall table the early-day motion again and then we shall have up to 300 signatures.

All I beg is that we should have a sensible discussion. No one wants the matter to be blown up into a Department. We want only a co-ordinator, an expediter with a title, who will reinforce the role of Departments already involved in these matters and who will give a helping hand as and when it is needed to all our ex-service men and ex-service women.

10.34 am

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), respect for whom is as pronounced in the ex-service community, and rightly so, as it is on both sides of the House.

I want also warmly to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on his success in the ballot, and on the speech with which he opened this important debate. At the same time, I am most grateful to him for having conferred his good fortune in the ballot on the ex-service community by taking my early-day motion 60 as the text for his motion today.

The early-day motion, of which my hon. Friend was a principal signatory on the day it was tabled, is comprehensively all-party. As the hon. Member for Dorset, West has said, the motion has already been signed by more than 200 Members of Parliament from both sides of the House, and enjoys huge support in an ex-service community which today numbers 16 million people.

I have an interest to declare in this debate, and I do so with pride. In the past five years, I have been, together with the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox), joint honorary parliamentary adviser to the Royal British Legion, but my association with the ex-service community goes much further back. I am an ex-service man myself, which included active service overseas, and my mother was a war

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

widow from when I was only seven years old until she died 24 years later. So my interest in the ex-service community goes back almost for as long as I can remember.

Let me make it abundantly clear today that neither the motion nor the Royal British Legion calls for a new Department of State. We seek not to emulate other countries which have departments of veterans' affairs, but simply and deservedly to make life easier for the ex-service community here in the United Kingdom—not least the war disabled and war bereaved—by achieving a modest and common-sense change in the machinery of government that will relieve them and their organisations from having to deal, as the House has already heard, with no fewer than 17 different Ministries.

One of our problems in this debate, of course, is that it is the Prime Minister himself, not the Minister who will be replying, who has responsibility for the machinery of government, and for that reason I ask the Minister to undertake in his response that he will draw what is said today, more especially what is said on behalf of the ex-service organisations, very urgently to the personal attention of the Prime Minister.

I must also make it clear that the issue that we are debating today is one about which the ex-service community feels very strongly indeed. This year's Royal British Legion conference, which spoke for 800,000 Legion members, yet again voted unanimously to press the Government to establish a sub-Department of ex-service affairs in an existing Ministry.

The ex-service community wants someone in Whitehall to focus the Government's attention on all their concerns: a Minister who can provide full access to the Government as a whole through a single Whitehall door. As of now, not only is the left hand of Government often patently unaware of what the right hand is doing, but it frequently appears not to know whether there is any right hand at all.

The sub-Department we seek will have a co-ordinating function so that, where people have disabilities and need help in regard to a war pension or a mobility allowance, housing, employment or retraining, they will no longer have to deal with 17 different Ministries. For them now to have to do so is needlessly bureaucratic and inefficient, costly to the taxpayer, damaging to the reputations of Westminster and Whitehall and hurtful to the ex-service community.

I know from my own experience as Minister for Disabled People from 1974 to 1979, as some other Members of the House will know from their ministerial experience, that there will be more to the proposed new sub-Department than a co-ordinating role. Those who work in the sub-Department, more especially the Minister under whom it operates, will acquire a wide-ranging knowledge of the problems and needs of the ex-service community.

Who can doubt that all the recent tension between the Government and the ex-service community over the 50th anniversary of D-Day could have been avoided if there had been more sensitivity to and awareness of that community's wishes than proved possible under today's scheme of things? The lesson we must learn from that debacle is that there was a disastrous lack of communication between Government Departments and the ex-service community until it was too late to avoid confrontation.

What the motion proposes is without financial penalty, and involves no extra tier of administration. Fifty years after the second world war, when all who served are now pensioners, it is a clear duty of this House constantly to inquire how well we are looking after that generation. All of us owe them an especial debt. That we are not now honouring that debt is not difficult to prove. The revelations made by the media about the plight of many of the war widows whose husbands died on the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944, not least of those who have never been able independently to afford to visit their husbands' graves, is proof enough.

Take the case of Harry Furbear, aged 77, the veteran of the Normandy beaches who was left dying on a trolley at a London teaching hospital, until his family offered to pay for a private bed. He died at King's College hospital on 6 June 1994—the 50th anniversary of D-day—after waiting for five hours in the accident and emergency department there for an NHS bed. That case, like the financial difficulties of so many elderly war widows, shames us all.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): By using that example, which manifestly should not have happened—I do not know the full story behind it—the right hon. Gentleman is reawakening my worries about the proposal, which the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) dispelled. I congratulate him on tabling the motion.

He talked about a Minister who would be a facilitator and who would, basically, bang heads together. What the right hon. Gentleman is implying is that there would be a substantial sub-Department which would take over the roles of other Departments that applied to ex-service men. There would then be a major dispute between the Department of Social Security, the Department of Health and other Departments.

We should all wish to dissociate ourselves from the example given. No one is suggesting that a Minister with responsibility for ex-service men could have stopped that happening. It was clearly a management issue within a particular hospital.

Mr. Morris: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice). That case was argued in the media, not only in the journals of ex-service organisations, as an instructive lesson about the need to make sure that there is a focal point to which families very quickly can refer. I shall be making it clear as I proceed that there are many avoidable cases of suffering that a co-ordinating Minister could avoid by prevention.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member—we agree from time to time on other issues—but I hope that he will agree with me that the distressing case I mentioned has many lessons to teach us. We are not talking about a new Department of State or about a single Minister acting executively in every case. We want to prevent any kind of preventable suffering by having institutional arrangements that make it impossible to happen.

Mr. Heald: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: I heard the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), who wants me now to give way, talk earlier about the national health service. It is too little known—I speak as a former co-ordinating Minister—that war pensioners have a special right to

priority in the national health service. They have priority as of right. Now that is not known to thousands of GPs and other doctors in this country.

With the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), I was with the principal officers of the Royal British Legion the day before yesterday. We were talking then about the extent of ignorance in the medical world of the priority that existing arrangements allow war pensioners. But we need—I put it most strongly to the House—constantly to remind the community of the rights of the ex-service community, so that, as I said, the case at King's College hospital cannot happen again. I shall mention other points.

Mr. Heald: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: Very briefly, because there are other people who want to speak in the debate.

Mr. Heald: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I will keep it brief, because I would like to make a contribution myself.

On the point about the hospital in London, how on earth would it have made a difference if there had been a Minister for ex-service men's affairs? He would not have been managing that hospital or had any role within it, would he?

Mr. Morris: I think I have already responded to a similar point. What I have said is that it is not appreciated by many GPs, among other people in the national health service, that war pensioners have special claims. That is not clearly enough known. The precise details of the case have been gone into at much greater length than I gave this morning. I think I was entitled to assume that the House would be familiar both with the particular case and with the concern expressed about it in the ex-service community.

I speak, as the House has heard, as joint honorary parliamentary adviser, with the hon. Member for Shipley, to the Royal British Legion. In that capacity, I have a close and continuing relationship, day by day, with those who administer the Royal British Legion and who look at cases like the one I have mentioned as legitimate grounds for concern.

Of course, the debt we owe to Britain's armed forces is not confined to those who served from 1939 to 1945 . Indeed, against the background of "Options for Change" and statements on the next round of defence cuts, there is need now not only to protect the men and women about to leave the services and those who have already left, but also to maintain the confidence of those still serving from whom so much will be expected.

Some people ask why the ex-service community must be treated as a special case. Many serve for as long as 30 years. Their conditions of service are special and the problems they face on leaving the service are not understood by most civilians. While the disciplined and ordered life they lead provides security, their career demands obedience and the taking of special risks. But unless they are injured or killed, this does not grant them or their dependants special treatment.

The demands made of those on active service—most recently in the Falklands and the Gulf, in Northern Ireland and Bosnia, where another young British soldier gave his life this week—are more widely recognised than those of service men and women generally.

How many of us in this House appreciate how difficult it can be for people now leaving the forces to readjust to civilian life, perhaps years earlier than they expected to be doing? Unlike their civilian counterparts, they have no territorial rights and no place on local authority housing lists. The days have long gone when ex-service people, on demobilisation or discharge, had priority for local authority housing.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): In Northern Ireland, ex-service people still have a degree of priority with the Housing Executive.

Mr. Morris: I am aware that there are differences within the United Kingdom, which themselves point to the need for more co-ordination. I rather sense that, in Northern Ireland, there is a bit more co-ordination between Departments than there is on this side of the water.

Ex-service people, on demobilisation or discharge, used to have a priority—indeed, a prescriptive right—to be considered urgently for local authority housing. That is not so today. Nor is retraining needed for employment in civilian life readily available. When civilians lose their jobs, most have a home and friends in their community to help them. Their wives or husbands have jobs to support the family and their children will be at the local school.

This is not so in the case of a service man who, if not from overseas, will be coming from another part of the country. Often both partners will have to look for a job, to find a home and a school and to put down roots in a community. All these problems involve different Government Departments and local authorities. It is for that reason that a specialised and co-ordinating Minister, with a staff who understand the whole range of the ex-service community's problems, is now so essential.

All of us rejoice, of course, that we have had no major war for 50 years. One consequence of this is that civil servants and even senior members of the Government have no first-hand experience of service life. The knowledge required to deal with customers—if I may borrow a term from the citizen's charter—often is not there. It is not there in the way that it would be, for example, in a community in the Rhondda, where a DSS official who did not know all about problems of ex-miners would be a very unusual official indeed.

I say without hesitation, from much personal knowledge of its admirable work, that the War Pensions Agency at Norcross has a very high reputation with the ex-service community for the sympathetic way in which it handles their problems. They are handled at Norcross by people who, although not having served, have obvious sympathy with ex-service people from dealing exclusively and as specialists with their problems and needs. This could quite easily be achieved across the board, not just for war pensioners but for all ex-service people, by setting up the sub-Department of ex-service affairs called for by the motion.

Let me give the House an example of how what we are seeking in this motion could have helped a soldier whose injuries led to paralysis in the lower part of his body in addition to other severe disabilities. He spent a very long time in a military hospital, not because his disabilities made it necessary for him to receive further treatment there, but simply because there was nowhere else for him to go. Although the local council where he wished to settle had agreed in principle to accommodate him, it could not

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confirm this until he had left the Army. But the Army would not discharge him without proof that he had somewhere to live—a catch-22 situation par excellence.

In this case, a co-ordinating Minister and agency would clearly have been able either to prevent or at least quickly to resolve that unfortunate ex-service man's problems. Thanks to his Member of Parliament, social workers and painstakingly hard work by the Legion, his avoidable extra suffering is now at an end. He is comfortably housed in a specially adapted home and is planning to write a book about his experiences.

That disturbing case alone demonstrates the urgent need for a co-ordinating Minister and agency. But sadly, the case is by no means unusual. In fact, the legion has had to act as a sort of sub-department of ex-service affairs itself in helping thousands of other ex-service victims of the present "system"—I put the word in quotation marks—and is continuing to do so. That is not, of course, the legion's role. It should be acting to supplement Government assistance, not as a substitute for it. Yet every day, it finds service men and women who lack the help and advice they need simply because they do not know where to turn to get it.

This motion can stop that happening. It will also enable the Government of the day, through the Minister responsible, to establish a closer and more effective relationship and better lines of communication with the ex-service community and the organisations, like the Royal British Legion, that work with unceasing concern and distinction to defend and promote their interests. It will improve Government policy-making and make the community as a whole more aware of the needs of people than whom no one has a more compelling call on the attention and support of this House.

10.56 am

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye in this very important debate. I know that a number of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members want to contribute, so I shall be brief.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) for the way in which he spoke. Although I do not entirely agree with the wording of his motion, I am sympathetic to the suggestion that we should set up a sub-department. I share the caution of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), who spoke so eloquently.

I recall that, 11 years ago, after I left a military hospital, I came home on the night of the 1983 general election. I knew that I had little time left to serve in Her Majesty's forces and I wondered what I was going to do; what the future held for me. When I was originally commissioned into the Gordon Highlanders I had hoped to remain in the service and make a contribution, at least up to the age of 55. Sadly, that was not to be because of injury.

On that night in 1983, with only a few weeks to go before I was discharged, I recall watching the election results coming in and making the decision there and then that I wished to become a Member of Parliament. Now, a decade or so later, I have the opportunity, provided by the hon. Member for Thurrock, to pay tribute to the staff and civil servants who now form part of the War Pensions Agency for their dedication, expertise and enthusiasm in looking after the interests of ex-service men and women, especially those who have been disabled in the service of their country.

A number of hon. Members have referred to the ages of ex-service men and women who have been disabled, and their dependants. It is not just a question of those in their 70s or older; not of those in their 60s or 50s; but of those in receipt of war pensions who require our help and support but who are very much younger than myself. They have served with distinction. There are those who were injured in Northern Ireland; those who served in the Falkland Islands; those who served in other conflicts in the middle east; or, indeed, those about whom we do not necessarily know, and of whose activities we may all too often be only vaguely aware, but who nevertheless did sterling work and were injured looking after the interests of this country and Europe, and the peace of the world as a whole. They have had to give up their careers and in some instances were particularly badly injured.

I am fortunate; officially, I am only 20 per cent. disabled. I receive some £86 per month tax-free from the Paymaster General. There are many people—the hon. Member for Thurrock and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) referred to other instances—who are at least 90 per cent. disabled. I do not know about the King's college case which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, but he was entirely right to draw attention to the priority treatment which those in receipt of war pensions should receive.

I pay tribute to the War Pensions Agency for publishing a new document entitled "War Pensions and Other Support —How To Claim: MPL153 April 1994". The document was published when the agency was created. Among other things, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, it draws attention to the priority that should be given in the national health service to those who require treatment for their war disability. It clearly says that ex-service men and women must make sure that their doctors and hospitals know that they are war pensioners, and if they have any difficulties, it lists the names, addresses and telephone numbers of people throughout the United Kingdom, on the mainland and in Northern Ireland, whom they can contact.

In the next few moments, I hope that it will be possible for me—following the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West—to suggest that it is entirely right that we should be cautious. We do not want to try to cut through the red tape and find, as I fear, that far from achieving what we want, we end up winding the whole thing in red tape. Certainly, at the end of this week, there will be at least 211 signatures on the early-day motion to which my hon. Friend referred. As he knows, I tend not to sign early-day motions because, frankly, their merits have been devalued somewhat recently. However, I think that it is an important one, and I hope that my hon. Friend is right and that the number of signatures will reach 250 or more shortly.

The issue will not go away but, I hope that, in drawing attention to some of the many positive things which the Government, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Social Security have done, especially over the past 20 years, it will be possible to demonstrate that it is not necessary to have full-blown bureaucracy—a Department or, indeed, a Minister. To put the remarks of the hon.

Member for Thurrock in context, I shall look back and see what has been done to look after war widows and those who are war disabled.

The armed forces pension scheme has been significantly improved since 1973. Before then, war widows could receive only the Department of Social Security pension or a forces pension based on their husbands' service, whichever was the greater. Since 1973, war widows have been allowed to keep both pensions. At the time, there was criticism that a differential had been created between the two groups of widows.

I am satisfied that it has been addressed, because special Ministry of Defence payments to pre-1973 war widows were introduced in 1989 by the former Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King). In April 1990, a tax-free payment of some £40 a week was introduced for all such women, and it now amounts to £47.84 per week. Also, since 1979, the Government have uprated war widows' pensions in line with inflation, and in 1979 the pension was made a tax-free payment, which is particularly significant.

In 1984, a new tier of age allowance was introduced to provide additional money for war widows aged over 80, and now there are age allowances for all widows over the age of 65. In 1987, extra help for funeral costs was made available to all war pensioners. The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe drew attention to that, and to the opportunities that are available for dependants to visit Commonwealth war graves throughout the world. Those are significant steps, and I know that the measures are warmly welcomed across the House.

Improvements have been made to income disregards for the purposes of calculating social security benefits. The payment that I mentioned of £47.84 is disregarded completely in benefit calculations, and other awards are partially disregarded. I shall lay down one marker in that regard. It is right that the Department of the Environment, the Department of Social Security and the Ministry of Defence should actively seek to encourage more local authorities to allow a greater disregard of housing benefit, because all too often the war pension is added into the calculation of how much money disabled ex-service men and women can earn before a decision is taken on how much benefit they should receive.

War disablement pensions are rightly paid at different rates to disabled people, depending on the extent of their disability. A pension is paid in cases where disablement is assessed at 20 per cent. or more; for those who are assessed at 19 per cent. or less, there is a range of one-off payments.

I particularly want to draw attention to two or three allowances. First, a treatment allowance is paid at the full rate of disablement pension where a person requires treatment for his condition and has reduced earnings as a result. When I left the Army, I received an allowance which brought my income to somewhere near the level that I might have enjoyed if I had remained an officer in Her Majesty's forces.

An unemployability supplement is available in cases of severe disability, together with additions for dependants. An invalidity allowance is paid to those in receipt of unemployability supplement, and a constant attendant allowance exists for pensioners in hospitals who require personal attendance because of their disability. That allowance is paid to people with a life expectancy of six months or less, whether or not he or she requires attendance.

There are also allowances for severe disablement, which are paid to people who are in work. There are also allowances for those working in a lower standard of occupation because of their injuries. There are age allowances, clothing allowances, comfort allowances and temporary allowances for widows which can be paid when a war pensioner dies while not eligible for unemployability supplement or constant attendance allowance. There is a considerable number of allowances.

With the advent of the War Pensions Agency, I am especially pleased that the Department of Social Security is giving greater publicity to those allowances. In Southport, which has a higher than average proportion of ex-service men and women—and, I might add, a higher proportion of members of the Royal British Legion in our community—more of them are beginning to realise that they are able to take advantage of those allowances. I pay tribute to those who work in the War Pensions Agency, who have bent over backwards to assist people needing help in making claims.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock on allowing us the opportunity to debate this issue. I underline the comments that I made earlier in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West. It is entirely right that we should be cautious. I shall listen carefully to the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister when he replies to the debate. We should recognise today the enormous amount of good work that is being undertaken. I end where I started—by paying tribute to the commitment, expertise and enthusiasm of the staff of the War Pensions Agency.

11.10 am

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I am delighted that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has given us the opportunity to discuss today the welfare of ex-service men and women and to explore ways in which we can better co-ordinate the handling of ex-service men's affairs at a governmental level.

This time last year, the constituency that I now represent was portrayed across our television screens as perhaps a retirement paradise—a pretty place to retire. For many of the people who live there, life is not quite so pretty as that picture, so the subject of the debate today is of concern to me and to many of my constituents, many of whom are retired service personnel.

Before I discuss whether we should have a Department of ex-service affairs, I wish to highlight the experiences of one or two of my ex-service constituents who feel that they have not had a fair deal. Last year, a retired squadron leader wrote to me. He was worried about how he would pay VAT on his fuel bills. He went on to tell me that, when he retired from the Royal Air Force in 1958, under the terms and conditions of the Government's premature retirement axe, which was in force at the time, he became entitled to a full officer's retirement pension. All well and good, we might say. Many deserving cases fail to achieve that. However, ever since he was first awarded his pension, its value has been fading away.

My constituent's entitlement now, up to and including last year's pension increase, is a little more than £8,500 a year. That is for a rank equivalent to Army major. By comparison, the annual pension of a squadron leader who retired last year would be closer to £16,000. Today, retired payment awards are almost double those made to officers who retired between 1956 and 1959. Indeed, their widows'

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pensions are about three times higher. It seems to me and to my constituent that, if it is considered right that officers who retire today need those rates of pay currently awarded in order to maintain a reasonable standard of living, the same reasoning should apply in the cases of officers who retired in earlier generations. My constituent had this to say:

"Most surviving RAF aircrew of my generation fought throughout the last war; . . . we had naively thought that we would at least be treated in a comparable manner to those officers who followed us. We were wrong".

I know that the issue of the low levels of pension awarded has been raised in the House by other hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

Mr. Heald: Is what the hon. Lady is putting forward the Liberal viewpoint? Does she know what the Labour viewpoint is? There is not one Labour Member in the Chamber for the debate on a major issue of this importance. Not even the proposer of the motion is present.

Mrs. Maddock: The view that I am giving is the view of my constituent, as relayed to me and which I promised to relay to the House. I have considerable sympathy with what that gentleman had to say.

One of the issues raised with me—this was mentioned by the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks)—by many of my constituents is the decline in the use of war pensions disregards by local councils when calculating certain benefits. Traditionally, local councils have been encouraged to disregard war pensions when calculating housing benefit and council tax benefit, but I fear that the great squeeze on local authority budgets implemented by the Government has meant that an increasing number of councils are having to look again at whether they can afford the disregard. I do not believe that that is necessarily because they lack compassion or are disrespectful to ex-service men. It is simply that the budgets are so tightly controlled by Whitehall that it is becoming more and more difficult to find that money.

Given that both housing benefit and council tax benefit are determined by central Government—even if they are administered by local government—it would not be wholly unreasonable to place a statutory duty on local councils to disregard at least some of every war pension when they calculate benefits. That would have to be accompanied by measures to allow local authorities to gather the funds necessary to do so.

I was also contacted earlier this year by an ex-service man who has had considerable difficulty obtaining a higher rate of war disablement pension. He has been trying to do so ever since he was discharged from the Army with rheumatic fever after the second world war. He was told when he was examined by an Army doctor when he joined in 1940, "You are an A1 chap. You will do all that an A1 chap is required to do. If you refuse to do it at home you will be court martialled and if you refuse to do it overseas you could be shot for cowardice."

After my constituent left the Army, he was told that he had never been fully fit and that his military service had aggravated a problem that was already there. Yet he has had the greatest difficulty convincing anyone else of that. He has been referred to the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Social Security and the Department of Health about his pension entitlement as well as to the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, and that is just in the past year. It does not really make any sense. So there is clear logic in having one Minister who can handle ex-service affairs as a whole, particularly when they go wrong.

Sir Jim Spicer: The hon. Lady outlines a sad category of disaster for that person. At what point has she written in indignation to the Minister on his behalf and said that she will not put up with treatment of that order for a constituent and that she wants something done? Has she received no reply to the constant attempts that she has made? If she has not, it is a disgraceful state of affairs and all of us should be disturbed by it.

Mrs. Maddock: Of course I have written on behalf of this gentleman, as my predecessor also did. We have failed to get satisfaction. I am still pursuing the matter. The gentleman had his case referred to an independent tribunal. It found in his favour, but I regret that the Government have not gone along with that. The matter is still being pursued.

The question is whether setting up a new sub-Department would help. I know that the Royal British Legion says that it would, and I have great respect for its views. It is attracted by the obvious benefits of having one focal point in the Government with which to deal. We could benefit from having a Minister with responsibility for ex-service affairs, without the disadvantages of the added bureaucracy of separating ex-service personnel benefits from those of other recipients and of dealing with their problems in a vacuum. There is a great danger that, if a separate Department of ex-service affairs were created, it could lead to marginalisation of those interests just as easily as the present system does.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I was reflecting on what the hon. Lady said a moment ago about the case of her constituent, who, she said, had gone to appeal and had won the appeal, but it had not been acted on. It would help the House, and certainly the Minister, if she could give individual details of the case, so that we can be sure that what she is saying is absolutely right, because she has levelled a severe charge.

Furthermore, she said earlier that she was speaking on behalf of her constituents. That is all well and good, but if she is speaking for her constituents and not for the Liberal Democratic party, of which she is a member, will she explain to the House why there is no spokesman for her party in the Chamber prepared to explain her party's policy on such an important matter?

Mrs. Maddock: First, obviously, I have written to the Minister, I am writing again and I shall continue to pursue it. Secondly, yes, I am speaking as a member of my party, and I said earlier that the Liberal Democrats had some sympathy with the motion. I apologise if that was not clear.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an allegation to be made that the Government are in contempt of an order of a court, without giving the name of the person concerned and the details of the case?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As far as the Chair is concerned, in this Chamber hon. Members are responsible for their own words.

Mrs. Maddock: Perhaps I should clarify matters. I made the point that the decision was made not in a court but at an independent tribunal on ex-service affairs. It found in my constituent's favour and made a recommendation and it was not acted on, as I understand it.

Mr. Heald: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Without trespassing on the good will of the Chair, it must be the case that, if it is a statutory tribunal, it has the powers of a court. If the allegation is that the Government are in contempt of court, it is about the gravest possible charge in our constitution. We must have the details.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the ruling that I have just given. Equally, the hon. Lady will have heard the views of the House and will wish to respond as she deems fit.

Mrs. Maddock: I am still pursuing the matter because we have not had an answer yet, so it is probably inappropriate to take it further today. I have written to the Minister. I merely want to point out that people have such problems.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): The hon. Lady is getting into quite deep water, and I wonder if she would respond to my invitation to withdraw what appears to be quite a serious allegation against some unknown Minister about some unnamed constituent. She has left an impression with the House that a decision on an appeal has been reached by a statutory tribunal, but that the Government—or a Minister—have been refusing to implement the tribunal's decision. From everything that I know about the way in which Government and Ministers work, that is almost unthinkable. Therefore, she has made a serious allegation. I sense from some of her most recent answers that she is not quite sure of her facts. Would she care to reword her allegation, and at least leave us with the impression that perhaps there are more questions to be asked, before she makes such a serious allegation?

Mrs. Maddock: I apologise if hon. Members think that I have been accusing a Minister of not responding. I was trying to point out that my constituent had problems in sorting out the matter and that I was in correspondence with the Minister to try to remedy it. If that does not clarify the situation, I am willing to give the Minister details after the debate.

Some of the problems identified by the Royal British Legion relate to the universal incomprehensibility of our benefits system. Many people have problems dealing with many of our Government processes, and such problems are not unique to ex-service personnel. However, ex-service personnel suffer more than most because of the different culture and different methods of dealing with their housing or their disability, for example, in the armed forces.

I hope that the Government will get the message from this debate that there is a fundamental problem in our tax and benefits system, which sends members of the public running from pillar to post between the Department of Social Security and its myriad agencies, the Department of Health, the Department of Employment and many other Departments. Sometimes tribunals go on for a number of years. Sometimes they are adjourned because relevant information is not available and we have to start all over again. Our entire social security system needs to become much more user-friendly, and particular attention should be paid to the problems faced by ex-service personnel.

The recent commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the D-day landings in Normandy has reminded any of us who needed a reminder that we owe a great debt to those who fought fascism half a century ago so that we could enjoy freedom and democracy in Britain and in many other parts of the world. We are all as rightly proud of our Royal Navy, the British Army and our Royal Air Force as we ever were. Our armed forces are facing cuts on a scale not seen since the end of the second world war, so we should be especially aware of the importance of helping ex-service personnel back into civilian life—encouraging them to retrain and to use their skills in industry, giving them the opportunity to resume their education if that is what they choose and assisting them, as other hon. Members have said, in obtaining decent housing.

The handling of ex-service affairs at a governmental level remains a problem, as we have all heard. The Government have so far shown a rather disappointing unwillingness to address that problem, so I hope that they will at least facilitate a proper meeting with ex-service men's representatives to consider how the matters should be addressed and to listen to what they have to say. Having a Minister for ex-service affairs, or perhaps giving a Minister in either or both of the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Social Security responsibility for dealing with and co-ordinating ex-service affairs would be a positive step forward and a much-needed sign that the Government recognise the problems highlighted in the debate and have a will to tackle the problems. I hope that they will take that step.

11.27 am

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Like other hon. Members, I declare what I think is a non-pecuniary interest, as yet another honorary member of the Royal British Legion. It seems that the House is full of such Members, and I am delighted to be associated with that organisation. I welcome the debate, and especially the way in which the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) presented his case. He put a number of points which have made some of us stop and consider carefully the merits of his arguments. I pay tribute to his initiation of the debate and his presentation of the arguments.

I am rather surprised, however, that, apart from a brief period, the Opposition Front Bench has remained in its current state—empty of any representative from the principal Opposition party. I should have thought that such a debate would merit attention by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen more or less throughout its course. There are important issues to be aired and one would have expected them to wish to hear the opinions of hon. Members and to present their policies.

We all owe much to those who have fought for this country. Although we remember every year those who have died, there are other memorials around us, not least the shields on the wall of the Chamber, as a constant reminder of the sacrifices that were made. We also remember the many people who carry their own reminder through the injuries that they have suffered. We do not remember just those who went through the world wars, but those who have offered themselves, perhaps without

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suffering injury, in more minor skirmishes or in continuing serious action in the Falklands and, in particular, Northern Ireland.

The problems encountered by ex-service people are not rooted in history. We are not talking about those who will fade slowly from the scene. Ex-service men and women who have been prepared to lay down their lives for this country will be with us indefinitely and solutions must be reached not just to suit today but for the future. The Ministry of Defence, like any good employer, has a duty to look after its retiring and redundant staff. Those employees are a special case because of their particular potential for sacrifice and the good employer rules should apply with particular strength to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) was right to remind us that the Government have already done much to promote the care and welfare of ex-service personnel. They have introduced schemes such as the resettlement training programme, established regional resettlement centres, entered into joint partnership with the British Legion to develop a new training centre at Tidworth —which has benefited from European grant—established a services employment network and published the "Services Resettlement Voluntary Supplement". All those initiatives are designed to assist retiring service men and women to find alternative employment.

I agree with my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) that ex-service personnel represent a special case because of their vulnerability. During their service career, those individuals lived in a particularly closed environment. They were looked after in a manner unknown by most people in civvy street. They were provided with housing and leisure through in-service provision. Welfare services were always available to give support where required. As members of the forces, they live in a disciplined, controlled environment.

Then suddenly, they are expected to make their own way in a new career, in a totally different world. It is therefore particularly important that they are looked after during that transition. In common with other hon. Members, I pay particular tribute to the work of the Royal British Legion in assisting in that resettlement process. Notwithstanding that work, the MOD must continue to exercise its responsibilities for looking after service personnel once they leave the forces.

A constituent came to see me about a housing problem. He had just left the Army, although his family were still living in married quarters. I gained the impression that the support that the Army had provided to him as he prepared to leave its service would soon cease. He would not receive any after-sales service, but service personnel require such a service for some years after they have left the forces.

I am delighted that the Government are assisting service personnel by allowing them to buy their married quarters. They are also participating in do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes, which will allow people to buy into their service homes. The saving schemes and the services preferential mortgage scheme provided by the Government are excellent means of assisting service people to purchase housing. Those individuals, like anyone else, want to buy their own homes. We know that 80 per cent. of the population wish to be home owners and there is no reason to suppose that Army, Navy or Air Force personnel are any different.

I am pleased to note that the Minister of State for Armed Forces has joined the Minister for Defence Procurement on the Front Bench. Yet another Government representative is present, which reaffirms my point about the absence of and lack of support from any shadow spokesman.

According to a recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1,700 families are living illegally in United Kingdom armed service married quarters. That figure has increased in recent years. Illegal occupancy does not mean pure squatting, but that people who have left the forces have not had alternative housing provided for them. That is a serious problem.

Many local authorities require the services to seek eviction orders before they will house homeless families. That is entirely contrary to Government policy. The Government have made it clear that service people should be given priority when applying for local authority housing, and it is a disgrace that some local authorities are not meeting that Government requirement, but instead are putting service families through the strain and trauma of having eviction orders served against them. That practice illustrates the accommodation problems encountered.

Another problem is that the real value of the lump sum gratuity paid to service families has declined. Twenty years ago, it was adequate to buy a home, but that is no longer so. That, too, adds to the housing pressure. In the 1960s, a sergeant-major received a lump sum of £5,000, which was perfectly adequate to buy an ordinary semi-detached house. Today, the lump sum of £15,000 is hardly enough for a deposit on a semi-detached house, the average value of which is in the region of £55,000. It is clear that securing long-term housing for ex-service people is a problem.

When the Minister for Defence Procurement replies to the debate, I hope that he will tell us how the new announcement of the housing trust with responsibility for service accommodation, the professional management of housing stock and the cost-effective use of MOD properties will ensure that some of the problems are overcome.

I have taken particular note of what the hon. Member for Thurrock said. When I first studied the terms of the motion, I questioned the establishment of a sub-Department, for three reasons: I wondered what it would achieve, what authority it would have and what work it would be able to do. We have already heard about the special health care, pension arrangements and resettlement grants that are already available to ex-service people, so what could a sub-Department achieve for those individuals?

Housing provision will still be a matter for local authorities and the Department of the Environment, while social security benefits must remain a policy matter for the Department of Social Security. Policies must still be determined by individual Departments and Ministers according to general criteria, so I believe that a sub-Department would achieve very little.

Secondly, what authority would a Minister in charge of such a sub-Department exercise? By virtue of the rules and conventions of government, he would have to be attached to a Department, but he could not be attached to all the Departments involved in matters which affect ex-service personnel. Such a Minister would be in danger of becoming a mere postboy or postgirl, passing messages from one Department to another.

Thirdly, what work would the new sub-Department do? The administration of benefits lies with the Benefits Agency, the administration of war pensions lies with the War Pensions Agency, and the administration of housing applications lies with local authorities, so the new sub-Department would not have much work to do. We do not need a specific Department to look after health and social security, because we do not have special programmes. Rather, we integrate welfare for ex-service personnel with the policies of those Departments.

At the outset, I sought to oppose the motion, not because I wanted to attack the welfare provisions for ex-service people but because I thought that the motion would simply increase bureaucracy. Having heard the constructive remarks of the hon. Member for Thurrock, however, I am more or less persuaded that there may be a case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West suggested, for a Minister at the Ministry of Defence to be specifically responsible for keeping an eye on ex-service issues and to have a minor co-ordinating role.

I emphasise the word "minor" because it should not be a sub-Department or a dedicated Minister, as I believe the hon. Member for Thurrock intended and as was the thrust of the initial proposals that I and other hon. Members received from the Royal British Legion. We are now presented with an idea that may be more acceptable to a wider number of hon. Members.

I detected a difference of emphasis in the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who reverted to the original proposal of the British Legion to create a specific structure within a Department. In this modern age, there is no place for increasing bureaucracy. We want to decrease it and reduce regulation. Provided that the welfare of ex-service personnel is specifically incorporated within an existing Minister's portfolio, we may make further progress.

Mr. Alf Morris: Representatives of the Royal British Legion have not, in recent memory, been asking for a new Department of State. I was reflecting earlier in the debate the points which they, as national representatives of the ex-service community, feel are extremely important. They have no time for grandiosity. They feel that they are victims of bureaucracy. The motion is not about creating a new bureaucracy but about making life easier for members of the ex-service community and their dependants.

Mr. Thomason: That summarises the difference between the mover of the motion and the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe. Other hon. Members may disagree with me, but the difference I detect is that the mover wants a Minister who would simply keep an eye on what is happening, while the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe wants to set up a structure that would co-ordinate and deal with the affairs of ex-service personnel, with civil servants being appointed to such a structure to process those matters and deal with delays. We cannot deal with delays for ex-service personnel in a separate compartment but only as part of the generality of those who are allegedly not receiving the service that they should be receiving from the Government. As the citizens charters suggest, everyone is entitled to a proper service from Departments, and we must beware of compartmentalising any section of the community.

I did not suggest that the Royal British Legion was arguing for setting up a Department of state. The word "sub-Department" has always been used, but a sub-Department with a dedicated Minister and a peripheral mass of civil servants working to support that Minister is different from a Minister who is part of an established Department, who already undertakes a series of jobs and who will have added to his portfolio responsibility for co-ordinating work relating to ex-service people. That idea is much more acceptable.

Mr. Mackinlay: At the risk of alienating the hon. Gentleman, given his supportive remarks, there is not a blade of grass between my objectives and those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). The debate is intended for hon. Members to bounce ideas off one another and try to influence the Prime Minister to think about the issue. However, I am in concert with the hon. Gentleman on the concept of making a start.

Let us have an existing Minister, which will involve no extra cost or bureaucracy, along the same lines as the Minister responsible for sport. That Minister has many other functions, such as responsibility for water, health, housing and a plethora of other issues, but everyone knows that he is also responsible for sport. A Minister responsible for ex-service personnel may already be in the Department of Defence or of Social Security, but his responsibility for ex-service personnel could be written into his job description.

Mr. Thomason: Many hon. Members would be happy with that arrangement, provided that it was not the thin end of the wedge. I am concerned that some hon. Members may see it in a slightly different context. I am perfectly happy with the provision of additional responsibilities, because, for the reasons I gave earlier, I have great sympathy with ex-service personnel.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I understand that the hon. Gentleman has remarked on my absence from the Front Bench. Had he been alert, he would have noticed that I was given a green card. I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) that I had to leave the Chamber briefly in response to a green card. Otherwise, I have been present all morning, and I intend to stay and listen to what the Minister says.

Mr. Thomason: I referred to the absence of Opposition Members on the Front Bench, not to a specific Member. I remain surprised that the Opposition can produce only one Front-Bench spokesman, who was here fairly briefly and then—albeit for good reasons—had to disappear and could not find anyone else to ensure that his party was represented throughout the debate. That is contempt for the purposes of the motion.

Mr. Heald: There was also a long period when no Labour Members were present.

Mr. Thomason: My hon. Friend is right, and that fact should be placed clearly on the record.

Mr. Mackinlay: My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) explained his difficulty to me. A constituent came to see him and, as mover of the motion, I fully understood that he had to leave the Chamber.

I hope that we shall not labour the point too much this morning, because the tenor of the debate has shown a common interest across the Floor of the House. I hope that the debate will not deteriorate suddenly into one in which

[Mr. Mackinlay]

partisan points are made and we score points off one another. In crafting my speech, I was careful to demonstrate to people elsewhere that this matter commands the interest of the whole House and is not a party political issue. I hope that the rest of our debate will proceed in that spirit.

Mr. Thomason: I hope that we can proceed in that way and that we shall see a representative of the Opposition Front Bench present for the remainder of the debate. That would be a pleasant novelty. Any partisanship introduced into the debate was started by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), who made the most extraordinary allegations against the Government and then left the Chamber.

Service men have the same right as all citizens to expect good and reliable service from the Government and Government agencies. Great improvements have been and are being made to the conditions of ex-service people, and much more is being done. There is a need for a demonstration of continuing concern for ex-service men through the Ministry of Defence acting as a good employer who cares for those who have left the service and are emerging into a different world. There is no case for a sub-Department, but I accept that there is a case to be argued for a Minister to take on ex-service responsibilities.

11.49 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Like the other hon. Members who have spoken, I think that we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) for raising the subject today. Like him, I am too young to have fought in the last war, but I can well remember soldiers camping in the yard when I was a small boy, which was exciting. I also remember being held in my parents' arms and watching the reflected glare of a burning Belfast in the sky in 1941.

As I grew older, I came to understand the debt we owe to all those who fought and died, and left dependants behind. It has not yet been mentioned that, for Ulster and for the wider public in the nation, today is a particularly appropriate day to have this debate. It is 1 July, the 78th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, in which many thousands of our fellow countrymen died, not least from the Province which I have the honour to represent.

On Sunday week, I was present at the unveiling of the first public war memorial in the southern part of my constituency—the churches, of course, all have their own. That memorial was unveiled in the village of Castledawson by Mr. Leslie Bell, who was wounded when he was 20, on the first day of the battle of the Somme. He is a sprightly 98 and I hope that the House will send him congratulations because he is back on the Somme battlefield today, as he has been for many years past, remembering his comrades who died and whose names are inscribed on the memorial.

The leader of the Ulster Unionist party, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), with Merlyn Rees and, no doubt, other hon. Members, have pursued the matter in the past. In the last Parliament, they asked Ministers whether the Government would make the provision sought in the motion for those ex-service personnel, but the Government declined to do so. Those Members have a keen interest in the welfare of the families and dependants of their past comrades and friends who died, and those who are still alive.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley is one of the few remaining Members of the House who saw combat in the war and, I believe, the last remaining Member who crossed the Normandy beaches on D-day. He was not in the first wave, but went across later to build an airfield for the Royal Air Force. He always says that, when he got there, the 21st Panzer division was in occupation, so they built the airfield elsewhere, prudence being the better part of valour on that occasion.

It was a great honour for me, as it was for every other hon. Member who did so, to visit Normandy on 6 June this year for the commemoration of that tremendous enterprise. It was an emotional and humbling experience to see the survivors march past, and it drew our attention once again to the debt that we owe them. It increased our pride in, and awe of, what they did; we were conscious of the pride of the veterans as they marched past.

The sense of the debt that we owe the veterans should be ever more present in our minds as we, and the survivors of the great wars, grow older. The question is how best we can discharge that debt. The hon. Member for Thurrock mentioned Ards borough council in Northern Ireland. The debt is felt strongly by those who were liberated in the low countries, France and throughout occupied Europe. On 6 June this year those people showed how grateful they were to so many people in the United Kingdom and elsewhere who took part in the liberation of Europe. They are always generous to those who visit. The people of Belgium want to repay in some measure the debt that they owe.

Ards borough council, like other councils in Northern Ireland, does not have the legal authority to pay for members of the public to travel to Belgium, but the Minister in charge of the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland can grant the authority. Those interested in the matter—not only Opposition Members but Conservative Members—should take it up with the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). We want to discharge the debt that we owe to all ex-service personnel and their dependants.

Today's debate goes some way towards clarifying the issue in people's minds, as was made clear by the remarks of the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason). The subject is too important for point scoring, although there has been some banter backwards and forwards across the Floor today. I hope that the Government will take seriously the arguments advanced and, if they decline to do what has been asked by the hon. Member for Thurrock, give us detailed reasons why.

The ranks of those who fought in the 1914-18 war are thin, and the ranks of those who fought in the last war are thinning, but others are joining them—many of them are severely disabled, not least because of Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, we have those who have served in the locally recruited regiment, the Ulster Defence Regiment, now the Royal Irish Regiment, and the regular Army. Those people have suffered, some of them grievously, and many of them are paralysed as a result of attacks. The victims and their dependants will require care for many years to come. I want that care to be delivered as swiftly, sympathetically and efficiently as possible. If we can have a one-stop shop, so much the better.

A one-stop shop is needed because there are so many agencies—all of us who have contact with ex-service personnel chase around the many agencies. The British Legion does a tremendous job, but it would be much easier for us if we had a one-stop shop to which we could direct our inquiries, be satisfied that they would be followed up and sensible, sympathetic conclusions reached as swiftly as possible.

When we come into the Chamber we pass through the Churchill arch, a symbol of what happens when one forgets defence. I fear that far too often we walk through that arch without thinking about the reason why it is there and the memory that it is supposed to call to mind. Far too often we forget the duty that we owe to those who fought for and served their country in the war, and whose dependants are still with us—many of their lives have been shattered by the experience of defending the freedoms that we enjoy. We could not be here today as a free nation were it not for the sacrifices made, and we should discharge our debt.

11.58 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I start by joining in the tributes paid to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) for raising this important subject today. I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), both of whom do so much for the Royal British Legion. In my constituency we are proud to have successful legions in Royston, Hitchin, Letchworth and the villages. At the recent commemoration in St. Albans abbey, they were very much to the fore, marching proudly behind their banners.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) spoke about the 50th anniversary of D-day. We were all touched when we saw those men marching with pride in themselves and their country, often bowed with age and supporting old comrades. For those of us of the younger generation who did not serve, it showed us a pride in country and a comradeship from which we should learn and which we should not forget.

Another aspect that shone through those celebrations was a pride in practical endeavour and in getting the job done. We should not forget that either. It was not just a question of pride in country and passion for freedom; it was also a job well done. I cannot see that the motion does any more than provide a certain recognition of that. In this place we recognise the sacrifices and endeavours of our fathers and their comrades-in-arms, but would a Ministry or sub-Department really have any practical purpose beyond recognition? I find it hard to believe that it would achieve very much.

The sub-Department for former service men's affairs has been described in this debate as a one-stop shop. Is it seriously proposed that when a service man left the services he would go to this sub-Department's office? If so, would it be sited in London, or in the regions—or would it be grafted on to the housing departments of each council, or perhaps the employment departments?

Or is the Ministry merely designed to be an expediter? Another explanation that has been offered is that the various Departments will still deal with matters as they do now, but that there will be a Minister whom people can harry and ask about their various applications. The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe suggested the idea of a hospital monitor; there would be no further problems in our hospitals for former service men, because this Minister would monitor the position and ensure that none cropped up.

Another description of the new post was that it would act as a focal point. Again I ask: what is the Ministry for? Is it necessary? I cannot believe that it is. It would end up, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) suggested, as little more than a post office. A former service man would enter this one-stop shop and say that he had a housing problem. Instead of his application being made to the housing department, as it would usually be, it would be sent to the former service men's Department, which in turn would apply to the housing department again. That would just add to bureaucracy. The same would apply to someone who wanted a war pension or an enhanced war pension. He would apply to the new Department, which would in turn apply to Norcross. What is the point?

If a former service man wanted a job, instead of going to the jobcentre he would go to the new former service men's Department, which would refer him to the jobcentre. I cannot see how that will achieve anything practical.

Is it really a proper recognition of the efforts of those who have done so much for our country to introduce an extra layer of bureaucracy? Is it preferable to make the Departments and agencies that we have work better? I concede immediately that improvements can always be made in every Department of state, but whether we need another layer of bureaucracy is extremely doubtful.

I am also worried that the idea might lead to former service men being regarded in a rather unhappy light by other members of the public. A well-trained person who leaves the services has the benefit of the access to excellence marketing scheme of registration, which means that he can go to the services' employment network. That network receives 700 new vacancies a month at the moment, and 80 per cent. of service men are being placed in work within three months.

Why then is it necessary to add a new Department; and what would other young people who are looking for work think if, in addition to all the provision already made for them, service men had an extra Department that seemed to be giving them even more of an advantage? If service men are treated as requiring special help, and hence not as competitive with other young people in the job market, might that not undercut the excellent scheme which is already doing so much for them?

No parliamentary motion can be comprehensive, of course, but this motion hardly reflects all the provision for service men that already exists. The War Pensions Agency, Norcross, does a fantastic job for former service men. It recognises their concerns and is expert in their needs. When I have tried to contact Norcross on behalf of constituents, I have always found it extremely helpful.

Crown immunity, which used to be a thorny issue, has been resolved, so that, if a service man has a legitimate claim against the Ministry of Defence, it can now be brought. There are new resettlement training cost grants of £500, and they provide former service men with additional help. There are eight new regional resettlement centres. I have already mentioned the access to excellence scheme and the services' employment network. All those benefits have been provided in recent years for former service men.

On top of that, there is the work of the Royal British Legion, whose offices help so many people. Then there is the work of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

Association, SSAFA, which has not been mentioned thus far—*[Interruption.]*—although I now see that my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is carrying his card. SSAFA is a point of contact for former service men in need, with access to regimental funds and assistance. It provides a national service.

Certainly there may be a need for change, but there is surely no need for more bureaucracy, which will do nothing to help the situation.

Sir Jim Spicer: We would all agree with most of what my hon. Friend is saying, but his point about the bureaucracy is not what those of us who advocate this approach want. We do not wish to interfere with or to break down the current system, but there must be an ultimate port of call for those cases that include a problem—and there will always be problems.

Joe Bloggs, perhaps at the bottom end of the scale, scratches his head and says, "I don't know where to go or who to get in touch with. I don't know about the Royal British Legion or SSAFA—they don't hang around on my doorstep." He will be able to pick up a pen and write to the Minister for former service men, Whitehall. That office will then pass on Joe Bloggs' letter to someone who will expedite it and who will make sure that all these other marvellous Departments do their jobs properly and without delay. From time to time, there are delays that I find inexplicable and claims that should be dealt with in days take months to process. I promise my hon. Friend that we are not looking for a new bureaucracy.

Mr. Heald: I do not believe that my hon. Friend was in his place when I paid tribute to his work for the Royal British Legion. I accept his point that there are often unnecessary delays. If that is so, we as Members of Parliament should press Ministers hard on the complaints that we receive from our constituents. My hon. Friend is well known for doing that, but particularly on behalf of ex-service men. He cited the example of the 30 ex-parachutists whom he helped in recent years. The bastion for members of the public who need protection is ourselves. At least, I believe that that is our role.

12.10 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words in this important debate. I was disgusted at some of the negative thinking expressed by Conservative Members. I am confident that there is a problem. Otherwise, we would not be debating the topic.

I declare an interest as a citizen of the British Isles who is eternally grateful to the men and women who fought and lost their lives, or who returned crippled with a variety of diseases or with shattered limbs. Pain, torment and torture was the lot of the people who were sent to fight. Wars are inevitably caused by politicians pontificating on why this or that is wrong. When they make a mess of it, the clarion call goes out to the citizens, "Rally round the flag and defend what we say is right."

I pay tribute to the Royal British Legion's marvellous work nationally and locally. It performs many acts of kindness that go unrecorded, and which should really be the responsibility of the Government. I hope that the Government will try to repay the debt of gratitude that we owe to those lads and lasses. The secretary of Rossington Royal British Legion asked me if I would take part in this debate, and of course I was only too happy to say that I would be present, in the hope that I would have an opportunity to say a few words.

When the bands play, flags wave and cheers go up, our troops are urged to march to battle to defend the country's interests—but when asked to defend their interests, we are a little like Shylock: we do not really want to know how we can repay our debt of gratitude to those men and women. Some people in this country follow the train of thought that the former Prime Minister caused a war to win a general election. The present Government above all ought to repay their debt of gratitude.

I have seen some of the war graves in France, where there are rows upon rows of white crosses. Anyone who doubts the need to repay our debt of gratitude ought to see those white crosses. The Government should meet the Royal British Legion to discuss how the problems can be resolved—whether through a Ministry or an ombudsman. By discussing a problem, one can often get shot of it.problem.

Sir Jim Spicer: The hon. Gentleman does himself and his party no great service coming here two and a half hours after the debate started and intervening without having heard earlier contributions. So far, speeches made from both sides of the House have been reasoned and responsible, and designed to bring about some solution that will meet every case. As an ex-service man, I take grave exception to the hon. Gentleman claiming that we do nothing for our ex-service men. That is the biggest load of nonsense that I have heard in the House in a long time.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's contribution. I listened intently to his speech. The Chair would vouch that I was present to hear the hon. Gentleman's contribution. I was making the point that the negative thinking of hon. Members seated behind the hon. Gentleman leads me to doubt the Government's sincerity in wanting to repay their debt of gratitude to people who served this country.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redmond: No. Although I left the Chamber for a short time, I have listened intently to the debate, and I certainly did not interrupt any other speaker.

There are many reasons that the Government should discuss with the Royal British Legion ways of helping people who served this country. In another place, there is a painting of the battle of Waterloo and another of Trafalgar. The pain and suffering that they depict are typical of the pain and suffering that follows war after war after war.

We shall never get shot of wars, so there will always be a need to help people who participate in them. People do not fight in wars because they hate Germany. Who are our enemies? In the two great wars, Germany was our enemy and America was our ally—but America was our enemy in the war of independence.

An uncle of mine was taken prisoner during the second world war and suffered stomach problems as a result of his poor diet. Nevertheless, he was proud to have taken part in the defence of the realm. Ex-service men who suffered atrocities in Japanese captivity are seeking compensation

from the Japanese Government. However that may be done, a Department of the sort proposed could assist those former soldiers to pursue their claim.

The rundown in the armed services has already been mentioned. There is a desperate need to help people who looked forward to a lifetime in the services but who are no longer required. The country owes those people a debt of gratitude, but we have been trying to avoid it. We owe it to them to set up a dialogue with the Royal British Legion to resolve the problem.

12.19 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): It is with some sadness that I follow the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond). His speech struck a negative note which disgusted me, and which contrasted sharply with the other speeches that we have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on his remarks, read the report of the earlier speeches and decide whether what he said was justified.

I now strike a slightly lighter note myself, and suggest that the positive nature of the speeches that we have heard so far may reflect the debt owed by the House to the ex-service men who act as Doorkeepers and Deputies to the Serjeant-at-Arms? It would be a brave Member of Parliament who said anything negative about ex-service men with them listening.

We all share another debt to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) for his thoughtful and sincere speech, and I pay tribute to the work of the Royal British Legion in my county. The county chairman, Mr. John Kimberley, has been a great help to me in sorting out my thinking on this important and difficult issue. I know that all the branches of the legion in my constituency—sadly, I am not an honorary member of any of them, but perhaps we can put that right—support the spirit of the motion.

In Worcester, we are acutely aware of the debt we owe to our ex-service men and women. This year saw the 200th anniversary of the Worcester Yeomanry and the 300th anniversary of the Worcestershire Regiment, both of which were celebrated in Worcester cathedral earlier in the year. No one who stood outside the Guildhall, as I did, and watched the march past of the veterans of the Worcester Regiment and its successors—formed by amalgamation—could have failed to be deeply moved by the pride and dignity that they showed. It inspired enormous emotion in us all.

I am too young to have served in conflict. Indeed, I have never served in any armed force, but I married into a service family and my mother was one of the ARP wardens who made such an important contribution during the second world war. My father—who would be 100 years old this month if he were alive—fought at Gallipoli with the Berkshire Yeomanry, in Palestine with the Imperial Camel Corps and then with the Worcester Yeomanry.

That fact alone has given me an acute recognition of the enormous debt we owe, not only to the victims of the second world war but to those of the first. I am particularly impressed by the strength of the constituency lobbying that I received on the issue, and the excellent way in which the Royal British Legion and similar organisations campaign for their members.

The motion refers to

"the care, welfare and interests of ex-service people".

Contrary to the impression that the hon. Member for Don Valley seems to have, hon. Members on both sides of the House believe in that. However, it also mentions the

"pressing need for a sub-Department of Ex-Service Affairs".

While we may be unanimous on the first part of the motion, the second has proved slightly more controversial.

The hon. Member for Thurrock seemed to be moving away from that demand to a rather more modest request for a designated Minister, which is not in the motion. I must say that—for the reasons given by many of my hon. Friends—that concept commends itself to me more than the more ambitious one on the Order Paper. We need to ask a number of questions about the need for a sub-Department.

First—I warn the hon. Member for Don Valley that this is a rhetorical question—do ex-service men and women form a special category because of what they have done and experienced? The hon. Member for Thurrock spoke of the debt that the nation owes to people who have risked all, or been prepared to risk all, in conflicts in all parts of the globe—in two world wars, in regional conflicts from Suez to the Falklands, from Korea to the Gulf and, of course, in Northern Ireland and Bosnia. We must never allow our country to forget that.

We are not just talking about a generation that has passed away as time takes its toll; we are talking a group of brave men and women whose numbers, in a dangerous and tragic world, will increase continually for the foreseeable future. As the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) pointed out, they may be few but they will always be with us.

Here is a difficult question: do those people constitute a unique group? I think they are. The scale of what many were prepared to do—lay down their lives for our freedom—is uniquely great. But how much separates ex-service people from the devotion, dedication and risk associated with many other members of society—policemen and women, prison officers, firemen, ambulance drivers and paramedics and even members of the Merchant Navy, whose officers and ratings have served our country so bravely in war and peace? The hon. Member for Thurrock reminded us of that last category.

Ultimately, I do think that ex-service men and women demand our special support and concern, because of the special risk that they have, as it were, strapped to their shoulders. But does that merit a sub-Department?

Service life has its special characteristics, which many hon. Members have said. Its continuity and inwardness may ill-prepare service people for the outside world; decision-making and initiative can sometimes be frustrated; there is always a superior on whom to rely in the well-ordered service structures, which does not apply to the world that the rest of us are forced to inhabit; the exercise of authority is always unquestioned, which is pretty rare in the rest of society, and certainly in the House of Commons.

All that means that people leaving service life need special help to adapt to civvy street—but does it require a special Department? Is it not the job of a responsible employer, which I think the Ministry of Defence is, to deal with the problems before those people leave?

We must not forget that today's volunteers know the risk that they are taking when they sign up, and—at least when not on active service—enjoy a reasonably comfortable life. Today, they leave the services well

[Mr. Peter Luff]

trained in skills that are often readily transferable to the private sector as a result of courses that they pursue during their careers with the Army, the Navy or the Royal Air Force. That does not suggest a need for a special Department.

Do ex-service people have special needs after they have left the services, meaning that they form a special category for which a sub-Department is necessary? An issue very much in my mind at present is mobility for disabled ex-service men. Let us look at public transport.

Recently, one of my constituents was frustrated in his effort to reach Normandy for the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of D-day because his motorised tricycle could not be accommodated on a British Rail train. I was extremely sorry about that. My constituent was offered help with the journey by, among others, Mr. Richard Branson; but, sadly, he had already cancelled his hotel bookings.

That man's problem, however, was not actually an ex-service problem. British Rail has worked hard on disability issues—I believe that it is the best in Europe in terms of access for disabled people. He was a victim of a problem that could have befallen any of my constituents lucky enough to have access to one of these marvellous new machines.

We should consider the question of cash compensation for disability. The British Legion and service men bring me examples of problems with disability living allowance and other benefits, but they mirror the problems of other constituents who do not have the strength of an excellent organisation such as the Legion behind them. The same is true generally in relation to benefits.

The Legion does a wonderful job in representing the interests of its members—as, in my constituency, does the Worcester citizens advice bureau, Age Concern, the disability information service, DIAL and the Worcester welfare rights centre for those who were not necessarily service men. If service personnel need more advice before discharge, that is the job of the MOD as a responsible employer, not a sub-Department after they have left the service.

I was interested to hear what the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) said about the War Pensions Agency. It is clear that it has won the confidence of its clients.

I fully support the view that pensions should be generous. Lobbying by the Legion is the best guarantee of that, and not necessarily the creation of a sub-Department. The War Pensions Agency is doing a first-rate job, but I wonder whether its title is not a slight misnomer. Having read the document "How to Claim", which was produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport, I believe that in the agency we already have something pretty close to a sub-Department for ex-service affairs under the stewardship of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, Viscount Astor.

I should like to discuss one aspect of ex-service pensions—the treatment of widows. Only last week, I received a representation in my constituency surgery from an ex-service man who married his wife after he had finished serving in the Army. I understand that, if he predeceases his wife, she will not receive any pension as a result of his Army service, yet the lateness of his marriage owed much to the fact that his service took him around the world and denied him the opportunity to marry sooner.

There is something to be said for reconsidering that aspect of pension provision in the armed services, to see whether it is possible to give some enhanced security to widows of ex-service men, even if they were not married to them during their period of service. I hope that the MOD will be able to tell the House that experience in this area matches best practice in the private sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) spoke about housing issues. It is true that ex-service men and women are thrown on to the housing market in mid-career, but the problems that that causes are the responsibility of the services before service personnel leave the service, and the Government have taken a number of important initiatives—the joint services housing advice office, the service home saving scheme, the discounted sale scheme for surplus married quarters and the nomination schemes for housing associations that are sold or leased surplus MOD property.

The Legion says that many who have served need counselling after the inevitably horrifying experiences that they can, even now, have serving in our armed services. Again, that is the responsibility of the services as a responsible employer, and not of a new Department for ex-service affairs.

I think hon. Members agree that ex-service men and women have special status. Does that demand structural change in Government? I conclude that, on balance, it probably does not. The Legion, which was founded three years after the first world war, exists precisely to further the interests of ex-service men and women and it is doing a splendid job. The case studies that I have been provided with by the Legion to justify the creation of a sub-Department have probably, if anything, proved rather the opposite—that, because of the excellence of the Legion's work, the need for a sub-Department does not exist.

I am instinctively more sympathetic to voluntary rather than state action. It is more flexible and more responsive. The moral pressure that the Legion can bring to bear on Members of Parliament and Departments is rather greater than the statutory pressure that a sub-Department would be able to bring to bear.

Apart from the Legion, other sources of help exist for ex-service men. We have had heard about the service benevolent funds, the regimental associations and the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Family Association. Taken together, that is a powerful network of assistance for ex-service men and women, the activities of which we all welcome.

The Government have done a great deal more than perhaps the hon. Member for Don Valley suggested. The War Pensions Agency is a powerful force for good for ex-service men and women. It has reviewed the guidance on the priority that should be given in the health service to all pensioners. It provides resettlement packages for those who are invalided out of the services, and for those who retire early there is the tri-service resettlement organisation.

One very powerful sub-Department of ex-service affairs already exists—this House. No hon. Member will not give the highest possible priority in his or her constituency work to the needs of constituents from the services. We are a powerful force for ex-service men and women.

Finally, there is the question of what such a sub-Department would do. It would provide co-ordination at the centre, but, as a number of hon. Members have said, all the assistance that is delivered to ex-service men would still be delivered through a plethora of agencies and 17 Government Departments, just as at present.

All that a sub-Department would do is add an extra tier of bureaucracy for ex-service people and their organisations to deal with. It would create a real danger of buck-passing. Sixteen of the 17 Departments that do not have the sub-Department will breathe a big sigh of relief and will do less than they presently do for ex-service men and women.

All the flak for alleged Government failures would not be directed at individual Ministers, but at the sub-Department. Other Ministers who are currently subject to all the marvellous pressure from Members of Parliament, the Royal British Legion and elsewhere, would get off scot-free. Given the strength of the lobby for ex-service men and women, having ex-service issues spread around is a good thing, and delivers the best outcome for ex-service men and women.

I advised on Government relations before coming to the House. I always prefer to deal with an issue that involves more than one Department. That often enhances the chances of success. Governments are not monoliths, but diverse structures. If one gets a no from one Department which is the only one responsible for an issue, that is the end of the matter, because there is nowhere else to go. But if other Departments are involved, getting a no is not the end of the matter. I worry that creating a sub-Department could, on ex-service issues, turn the Government into a monolith and make it more difficult to win issues on behalf of ex-service men and women.

Having said all that, the question remains, what should be done? I would not die in a ditch fighting the idea of a sub-Department if that was what ex-service organisations really want; we have to listen to that. However, I believe that such a move could be counter-productive. Perhaps there is another solution that goes some way towards meeting the concerns and that would not have the adverse consequences of a fully blown sub-Department. The hon. Member for Thurrock made the rather more modest suggestion of a designated Minister with prime responsibility for ex-service issues.

We are already pretty near that position, because direct responsibility is held de facto by only two Ministers: my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, from whom I always receive excellent replies on ex-service issues, and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security. I find the service from them excellent.

Perhaps one of them could have prime responsibility for ex-service issues, and the role of dealing specifically with ex-service organisations and their concerns. I do not mean a more general, broad-brush postbox for anyone who had a concern, but a means by which organisations such as the Royal British Legion and SSAFA could say to that person, "This is the problem; can you sort it in the machine?" Perhaps we could think about that.

The veterans deserve a special status in our society. That is best guaranteed still by ensuring that they get the best advice and assistance when they leave the service, and by ensuring that the benefits and health care on which they depend are delivered efficiently and fairly to the whole of society. The Government's reforms are achieving that.

Ex-service men and women tend to be prudent people, but they often have relatively low savings. My constituency is full of such people and such households. Their prudence often cuts them off from benefits and they feel aggrieved as a result. Helping those people, from whatever walk of life they come, will bring real benefits to them.

In the meantime, I welcome our commitment to protect pensions from the impact of VAT on fuel, our success in improving the health service, and the developing pragmatic policies on improving mobility and access for the disabled. All that will bring real benefits to ex-service men, without the need for a sub-Department.

There is one thing that we can and should do for our ex-service men and women. We must ensure that we do all we can to maintain Remembrance day and the dignity that goes with it. We must remind our young people that Remembrance day and the needs and problems of ex-service men and women are not just about a bitter trench war which began 80 years ago or about a war against totalitarianism and organised racism which ended 50 years ago, but about all the brave men and women in the British armed forces who have given their lives in more recent wars around the world, always in defence of this country, its interests and values, and who continue to risk their lives in that same cause even as we debate the motion today.

12.39 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is temporarily out of the Chamber, introduced his topic in a refreshing way. The manner in which he has championed his cause has been well-regarded on both sides of the House. Indeed, many people will look to him to champion other causes because of the way in which he has handled this one.

The hon. Gentleman treated us to wonderful Churchillian tones, which are still ringing in my ears. It was a refreshing contrast to the many pacifists and former and current members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament who share the Labour Benches with him. I hope that I am right in saying that he has never been a member of such an organisation, and therefore is not open to the charge of hypocrisy for having championed this cause. I pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff)—come Remembrance Day, I hope that Labour Members will wear a red poppy and not some trivial white emblem in their lapels.

Ex-service men are special because what of they have sacrificed, or have been prepared to sacrifice, for their country. By "ex-service men", I mean both ex-service men and ex-service women. I and, I suspect, many of them would not want me to make a concession to political correctness in adding "women" to "service men" whenever I mention them.

The Royal British Legion does an enormous amount of work for the welfare of service men, and every hon. Member will have people in their constituencies who put in hour after hour looking after their welfare. A little thing we could all do, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) said earlier when I waved my SSAFA card, is to have a credit card that gives a bob or two to such a cause whenever we buy our champagne in Threshers, or whatever. That would go a long way towards helping an important cause.

[Mr. Alan Duncan]

I have a simple point. Is the motion a good idea that risks becoming bad government? I fear that it is. Many good ideas are floating around; there are many good and worthy causes, but the challenge in this House is to ensure that they are translated into good law and good administration. My fear about the creation of a sub-Department in one Department or another is that that risks converting a very good cause into poor administration —indeed, as my hon. Friend for Worcester said, into inferior administration. It is our responsibility in this House and this debate to ensure that that does not happen.

The hon. Member for Thurrock said that ex-service men today are not just the veterans of, largely and increasingly, the second world war, but comprise a number of much younger people who have served a few years in the services and, because of their preference to change career, or because of "Options for Change", are now, even at the age of 30 or 35, in need of a good deal of help. The hon. Gentleman implicitly said that even the younger people should have some sort of special help. The problem with the younger ones in particular is that they are as much a part of a social security, national health service or housing problem as any other citizen, be he or she a former policeman, a former nurse or whatever.

The problem with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is that, in reality, he is saying that, in our administration of the concerns of ex-service men, we should divert all their applications for help through a specific sub-Department just because they are former members of the services. Former policemen would not have a similar sub-Department: they would have to look to all the various Departments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North said, it is an important role of individual Members of Parliament to refer the cases of their ex-service constituents to the Department that they know has responsibility for those concerns.

What would we actually get if a sub-Department were set up—be it in the Department of Social Security or the Ministry of Defence—specifically for ex-service men? We would end up complicating the manner in which the help they desperately need is delivered. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester said, we would add a layer of bureaucracy which would work to the detriment of what they want to see.

We have heard quite a lot of jargon this morning. We heard that we want someone to "expedite" matters, we want something to be the "focal point", and we want "one-stop shops". That is all very well but we want action, not jargon. My fear is that, if we create a diversionary loop through a new sub-Department for all the concerns of those individuals, we will hinder the machinery of government in helping them, rather than assist it.

What we would do is make the Minister with special responsibility a glorified post box. If individuals or, indeed, Members of Parliament write directly to the Minister, a few days would be added before the letter pleading for some assistance for a constituent ends up on the desk of the Minister responsible. It would be at least two, three, or four days, or perhaps a week, before the letter went from the Minister with special responsibility to the Department of Social Security, a sub-Department of the Department of Social Security, or a special part of the Ministry of Defence.

That would not help the individual we are trying to help. We would create a glorified postman in ministerial guise. He would simply process letters from individuals or Members of Parliament to the Department. He would be a postman who had not a red van but simply a red box. I cannot see how that would help.

I urge the hon. Member for Thurrock, who has been an appealing champion of an important cause in which I think all Tory Members share, to reconsider whether the cause that he is championing will translate into better government if his proposal is put into play. I do not think it will. We do not want any symbolism; we want good government for the interests of all ex-service men, of whom we have many examples in our constituencies.

One point on which I agree with the hon. Gentleman is that of the casting of medals for national service. Fortunately, we live in a time of peace, by and large. We have just celebrated 50 years of the beginning of peace. There are people with pride who have put in a lot of time and their careers, to put themselves at risk, to guarantee that peace. Often, they are as important as those who put their lives at risk in combat.

As for the wearing of medals, which are able to be worn through the generations, it is important that we recognise those who have kept the peace as much as those who have fought in war.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his gracious comments. In a sense, he attributes too much power and influence to me. The important fact is that more than 200 hon. Members support the motion that there should be an ex-service affairs Ministry, including those who have served in the armed forces and, indeed, seen conflict. That is a powerful argument which the hon. Gentleman and I need to be mindful of when considering the issue. The fact that others of different generations are pressing for a sub-Department is persuasive.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he says. The point is that, when an early-day motion is put before hon. Members which supports such a worthy cause as those who work for the Royal British Legion and the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association, and those who benefit from their work, it would appear churlish not to sign it. When it comes to discussing the specifics, we are duty bound to stop and think, and work out whether the hon. Gentleman's proposal will make the serving of their interests by Government better or worse. I fear that it would not be better.

As I have said today, the hon. Gentleman has been a worthy champion. I believe that everyone on the Conservative Benches would congratulate him. He has raised the profile of the issue. He has done it in such a cheerful and Churchillian way that perhaps he would consider coming across to this side of the House in a manner which would serve to improve our street cred. I hope that, in the ministerial answer, the points that I have raised will be taken up.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way before he sits down?

Mr. Duncan: I have finished.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Has the—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman was not given way to.

12.49 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I wish to take a few moments in this debate on a subject of interest and importance. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) referred to a medal for national service men. I have some vested interest in that, having been a national service man. If such a medal were introduced, I would be one of those in the House who would be eligible to receive it.

The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) referred to the attendants and badge messengers in the House. I have slightly more reason to be aware of their presence in the House than others perhaps have. When I did my national service, some of them were sergeants in the Royal Marines. They were not quite so polite at times on the parade ground as they are when I now pass through the Lobby and come into the Chamber. They are courteous and make this place work in the successful way that it does. Certainly, at that time they were doing their job and I was doing my job. I did two years of service in the Royal Marines.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton asked why we should move along the lines suggested in the motion. It is not simply because my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has moved the motion. It is not because 200 Conservative and Opposition Members of Parliament have supported the early-day motion that has been on the Order Paper throughout this Session. Nor is it because I believe that it is the right thing to do. The reason why I support the motion today is that it is overwhelmingly the view of those people who gave valued service during the war and fought for the type of society in which we live and to defeat fascism so that we could have a free Europe in which we could express our views, even at times when we strongly differ in our views, that we should set up a sub-Department of ex-service affairs.

Earlier this month I attended some of the D-day commemorations, as I am sure that many other hon. Members did. I went to a service at Blackburn cathedral. I am a member of the Royal Naval Association in Burnley because there is no Royal Marine Association. The people in the East Lancashire Royal Marine Association managed to persuade me to join that association while I was at that service. The people taking part with great pride in the commemoration, marching with their banners and bands, were clearly of the view that we needed a Minister such as my hon. Friend's motion calls for and the type of structure referred to in the motion. I believe that if that is what they believe, there must be a case for such a sub-Department. On that basis, I strongly support the motion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock made some important points. I want to touch quickly on one or two of them. He referred to the nuclear test veterans and the Japanese ex-prisoners of war. In my constituency, I have an active Far East Prisoners of War Association which represents those people who were prisoners of war of the Japanese during the second world war. Those men and their families have suffered for so many years as a result of the way in which they were treated. They certainly believe that we need to have the type of Minister and sub-Department that we are discussing.

I would especially like to add one point to those made in my hon. Friend's opening speech. Many of us remember that, in the early weeks of the present Prime Minister's term of office, some of the first questions that he answered in 1990 were on the two issues of the creation of a Minister and a Department for ex-service men's affairs. He certainly gave hope to many people that action would be taken. People are still trying to prove conclusively whether the suffering of nuclear test veterans can be attributed to the tests. The benefit of the doubt should be given to the people who took part in those tests.

The compensation for prisoners of war agreed between the two Governments in the 1950s is derisory and something needs to be done about it. Obviously, I do not view this debate as one in which one would put those arguments in great detail. I mention them only because it clearly illustrates the need for a Minister to deal with those problems and ensure that speedy conclusions are reached, so that people receive the justice and respect that they deserve before it is too late.

We must remember that, year by year, the veterans die, as I know all too well because one of my uncles, who lived in Burnley and who served all through the war in the Royal Navy, died on Friday last week and was paid great respect by the Royal Naval Association at his funeral on Wednesday. The people concerned are getting older and it is important to reach a speedy decision to ensure that they receive the justice to which they feel—and we all should feel—they are entitled for what they gave for this country during the second world war.

In an intervention during my hon. Friend's opening speech, I referred to one part of the letter that I received from the Royal British Legion in Burnley. A point was clearly put in its letter, which said:

"we lag behind the rest of our wartime allies"—

In brackets after that sentence, it said, "and enemies". It is significant that so many war veterans feel that, having fought for peace, for the type of world and the democracy that we have today, they have not received the same respect and treatment as some of the people who fought with the axis powers in that war. If they feel that, it is a tragedy and we should try to remedy the situation.

Mr. Schofield, the chairman of the Burnley branch, went on to say:

"as the D-day commemoration happenings proved, we are first rate at pageantry. Let us be in the forefront for welfare."

That sums up the views of ex-service men throughout the country. They believe that it is time that we had a Minister to ensure that they get everyone to which they are entitled. That does not mean that I am criticising the War Pensions Agency, as I am not: I accept that it does much work. Also, obviously, the Royal British Legion and the regimental ex-service associations do tremendous work for their members.

Nevertheless, there is a gap—and we have the opportunity to ensure that that gap is filled. Hon. Members have referred to the 17 Departments involved in different aspects of ex-service men's affairs. Let us have one Minister who has the power to ensure that, whatever Department he is dealing with, he is given priority and that matters are dealt with urgently.

I give the Minister one suggestion. We all know that a Government reshuffle is likely some time this month. Let him draw the attention of the Prime Minister to one ministerial post which is used for various functions from time to time—that of the Chancellor of the Duchy of

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

Lancaster. It is a Cabinet post which has been used at times by the chairman of the Conservative party and by others. When the reshuffle takes place, that office—which exercises certain powers and responsibilities in the Duchy of Lancaster, although not enough to warrant a full-time position in the Cabinet—should deal with ex-service personnel matters.

If the Government took that bold step, ex-service men would start to believe that they will get the justice to which they are entitled and be treated in this country with the same respect and be held in the same pride as they command from other nations. That is what hon. Members should call for.

I agree with many of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock and others, and I would not wish to prolong the debate, except to say that this is a valid motion. The Government must accept that 1994 is the time to put matters right before it is too late.

1 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) made a number of good points, not least in drawing our attention to the fact that the work of representing our ex-service men and women is already being done in a commendable way by organisations such as the Royal British Legion and the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Associations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has already said, however, it is the Royal British Legion that believes that something more should be done, and we should consider its argument weightily and with respect.

The starting point of the debate must surely be one of consensus, because everyone has congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on his good fortune in the ballot and on his initiative in choosing this subject for debate. He has also been congratulated on the way on which he has consistently argued the case for ex-service personnel. By doing so, he has joined those on both sides of the House who, over the years, have drawn attention to the special needs of our service personnel.

One thinks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) who is, I believe, a consultant to the Royal British Legion, the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) and others, who have, over years, consistently championed the cause of our ex-service men in a non-partisan manner.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) and I are joint honorary parliamentary advisers to the Royal British Legion. I should like to make one other point briefly. There has been talk of our just having celebrated almost 50 years of peace, but the service community does not regard what happened this year as a celebration; it was seeking a dignified commemoration of the 50th anniversary of D-day.

Mr. Anderson: I believe it is fair to say that that is what it got, eventually. I hope that all hon. Members will recognise, however, that those concerns represented an unhappy chapter in the arrangements. May I say in a non-partisan way that the misunderstandings, which were not fomented for partisan reasons, arose because of the understandable sensitivities of ex-service men about their own dead and fallen comrades. They believed that there was nothing to celebrate, but a great deal to commemorate.

The problems associated with the D-day arrangements illustrate that that sad saga and the misunderstandings might have been averted if there had been a Minister with specific responsibilities for ex-service men. If we had a Minister who could keep in regular touch with the Royal British Legion and organisations such as the Normandy Veterans, misjudgments such as those that appear to have been made at an early stage in the arrangements for commemorating the D-day landings would be less likely to occur.

We should remember that when men went over the top in the first world war and when our people fought together during the D-day landings, they did not ask each other on which side of the political divide they fell. We should respond in exactly the same spirit when we consider the way in which the House should deal with the affairs of ex-service men.

Sadly, relatively few hon. Members today have direct knowledge of service life. No one under the age of 55 will have done national service, and relatively few hon. Members have served in our regular forces. There is therefore an increasing gulf between those who have experienced service life and Members of Parliament

Mr. Duncan: Although those of us who are young may not have direct experience of service life, some of us come from service families. So the non-partisan understanding which the hon. Gentleman wants in the House can come down through the generations.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, but there is a great difference between the ethos that comes from a service family and direct experience of service life.

The motion has broad support. It constitutes an important recognition of the debt we owe to our service people. All those who have spoken have favoured more dialogue but expressed caution about how we should respond to that call administratively. We all clearly recognise that this is a timely debate in view of the commemoration of both the Italian and Normandy landings.

May I recall a personal experience? I worked on a farm near Caen for some time. During a fete held by several local villages, there was a procession to the local cemetery. As the only British person in the area, I was honoured to join local veterans in the procession. As a young man of about 19 looking at the British graves, I was struck by the large number of those who had fallen on the Normandy beaches who had been my age.

We are aware of the campaign that has been mounted so sensitively by the Royal British Legion and have much sympathy with the broad thrust of the argument. We recognise, as does the legion, that the issues involved cover several Ministries. As several hon. Members have said, that is part of the complexity of responding to the demand. Everyone recognises the real need for better co-ordination to deal with the many areas of interest to ex-service personnel.

I have mentioned the misunderstanding over the commemoration of the Normandy landings. Given the Government's response to the health problems of those who served in the Gulf, I wonder whether that could have been dealt with more sensitively had a Minister been

specifically responsible for the matter. Contrast their treatment with the treatment of veterans in the United States with what is deemed to be "Gulf war syndrome".

One hon. Member asked how housing problems of ex-service men differ from those of the general population of the same generation. The Ministry of Defence is currently carrying out an exercise relating to its estate and the housing in its control. The needs of ex-service men must be taken fully into account in that exercise. I accept that that is already being done to an extent. It is important that people already in the services make their contribution. But this issue is different.

The formation of life in the services differs greatly from that of civilians who may be looking for housing. There is a need, therefore, to feed in to the consideration of how that new housing trust should be organised—in terms of its priorities and ground rules—the concerns of ex-service men. That is where a Minister with specific responsibility for ex-service men could make an input.

There is a need for better co-ordination, particularly at a time when the services are being decreased in size. There are worries about the complexity of the benefits system. The decision to restrict, without adequate consultation, the compensation available for noise-induced deafness resulting from service in the forces is but one recent example of how a Minister with special responsibility might have averted the problems that have arisen.

It has been well recognised by all who have spoken today that there are difficulties in creating either a separate Department of State or a large bureaucracy in one of the existing Departments, because of the overlapping responsibilities. But the need to improve co-ordination must be taken seriously.

We are considering setting up a specific unit in the Ministry of Defence under a Minister whose departmental responsibilities will include looking after issues relevant to ex-service personnel. Such a ministerial appointment would give status and a new authority to those matters. The war pensions directorate established under the Department of Social Security will give a more focused and efficient service to service personnel. We shall monitor developments and listen carefully to the debate.

The point of consensus is that our priority must, at all times, be to provide the best service for those who have served this country at home and overseas. We must now consider how best to achieve that goal administratively, with full recognition of our debt and in full consultation with those who represent the interests of ex-service personnel, particularly the Royal British Legion.

1.11 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), both on his good fortune in winning the ballot for the debate and on the stimulating and sympathetic way in which he marshalled his arguments in support of the motion. I thought that the House enjoyed his good-humoured and histrionic touches, which set a pleasant and constructive tone that lasted for almost all the debate. I also congratulate him on the timing of the debate, which takes place when the deeply moving scenes of the D-day commemoration events are still fresh in our memory. Those events, particularly the stirring parade of British veterans on the beach of Arromanches, where the salute was taken by Her Majesty the Queen, reminded us, graphically and emotionally, of the tremendous debt that we owe to our former service personnel.

It is appropriate for me, on behalf of the Government, to quietly put on record the profound sense of gratitude and appreciation that the House, Government and country feel towards those who served their Queen and country in the armed forces. Their contributions to the security of the United Kingdom are well recognised in the pages of history, but our recognition must also take tangible and living forms in the day-to-day life of the present. An important part of that recognition is to know that our former service men and women must be properly, fairly and decently treated by the nation. That principle has been the common thread throughout the debate running between both sides of the House.

I sympathise with the spirit of what the hon. Member for Thurrock said, but there are small differences of emphasis and approach on the practical arrangements through which we should uphold that principle. I shall remind the House of the practical arrangements already in place for looking after our former service men and women, particularly in pensions, health and housing. After describing those arrangements, I will then try to answer the principal points raised in the debate, and then turn to the central question whether we need a sub-Department of State for this purpose.

In general, we attach great importance to the principle that former service personnel should integrate fully with the civilian population; equally we acknowledge that they have a unique place in our society, and special needs. The substantial administrative arrangements that the Government already have in place to meet those special needs show that we take the welfare of the veteran community very seriously.

I was pleased that gracious compliments were paid by hon. Members on both sides of the House to the work of the War Pensions Agency. It came into existence only in April this year, but it was just the latest step in a process of establishing an organisation specially dedicated to the delivery of pensions and welfare services to war-disabled pensioners, war widows, their dependants and carers.

The organisation has moved from being a directorate within the Benefits Agency, through the interim step of the war pensions unit, to the successful attainment of executive agency status in the Department of Social Security. The tributes paid to it by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), based on his experience of working with the agency, and by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), served to show how well regarded and successful the agency has been in carrying out its duties.

I thought, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) had a point when he said that, as the agency is working so well, it is already fairly close to being a sub-Department for service men's affairs. There is some truth in that. The changes that we have implemented in recent years have helped to bring much greater efficiency in administration and improvement in the standard of services that we provide. The attainment of agency status is a beginning, not an end. The agency is committed to a programme of continual improvement in every aspect of its work. Already, claims are being handled much faster, there is a more personal approach and there are better communications—all of which help to meet war pensioners' expectations.

Mr. Alfred Morris: As the Minister has heard, I yield to no one in my admiration for the War Pensions Agency, from much experience of all its excellent work. What role could the agency as constituted have in dealing with the problems, for example, that arise from "Options for Change"—the employment problems, the training problems, and the housing problems of people who are leaving the services earlier than expected? I think that the ethos in the agency is very important, but it would most certainly say that, as constituted, it could not deal with the whole range of problems now dealt with by so many other Departments.

Mr. Aitken: The right hon. Gentleman is seeking to make the speech that he did not make earlier in the debate. I shall come to the question of ministerial responsibility for some of those other areas shortly.

I am glad that we can all pay tribute to the War Pensions Agency—and it is not an empty tribute, either. A recent customer perception survey showed that the agency has an 85 per cent. satisfaction rating among pensioners and other applicants.

I come now to the point about ministerial responsibility. My noble Friend Lord Astor, the DSS Minister with special responsibility for war pension matters, regularly meets and consults the central advisory committee on war pensions and takes a keen interest in the agency. He also meets representatives of local war pensions committees and other former service men's organisations. Lord Astor liaises closely on these matters with my noble Friend Lord Cranborne, Under-Secretary of State for Defence, who has a number of responsibilities: medals, resettlement, and armed forces' pensions. He is also the point of contact for former service men's groups, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and queries about people's periods of service. From that list hon. Members can see that these two Ministers act as points of contact for a wide range of matters.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe thought that he had delivered a knock-out blow when he complained that no one was doing a good job in bringing to wider attention the fact that special national health service priority could be given to war pensioners. It is certainly important that more general practitioners should know about existing priority arrangements.

On 16 May, my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health, Lady Cumberlege, announced that new health service guidelines were being issued that day, to reinforce an instruction issued in August 1992 on NHS treatment for those who have a pension or receive a gratuity for disablement caused by armed service. My noble Friend made it clear that the Government had written to trusts, hospitals and family health services authorities

"to remind them they should give priority to war pensioners, both as in-patients and out-patients, for examination or treatment which relates to the conditions for which they receive a war pension."

Again, somewhere in Government a Minister is fulfilling the role that at least one hon. Member complained was not being performed.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The Minister is reading from notes that were written for him before I made my speech. I did not claim to score any particular goal, but reported what had been said to me and to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) by officers of the Royal British Legion the day before yesterday. They made it clear that many GPs and others in the medical profession seem not to know that guidance has been available for a long time. More people need to know about those arrangements.

Mr. Aitken: The right hon. Gentleman's thesis was that we need a new co-ordinating Minister to deliver the message to GPs, hospitals and patients that priority treatment is available. I was not quoting from notes written before the debate but from a Department of Health press release reporting that a Minister had already performed the task that the right hon. Gentleman complained had not been completed because there was no specially designated Minister. I was developing the thesis that many such tasks are already well covered by active Ministers in various Departments.

My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—argued that it was necessary to strengthen the work done by Departments for ex-service men and co-ordination between Government Departments. I view that concept sympathetically and am willing to have further dialogue with my hon. Friend and with the Royal British Legion.

I am glad that my hon. Friend's speech acknowledged that there are problems for the Government in a special sub-Department, the creation of which could cut across existing lines of communication—including that between Members of Parliament and their constituents. I am sure that any requests from my hon. Friend for a meeting with Ministers would be welcomed and acted upon with the usual courtesy.

Mr. Mackinlay: I welcome the Minister's remarks, and I appreciate that other matters are not in his gift. Will he recommend to the Prime Minister that he finds time to meet representatives of the Royal British Legion and of other ex-service organisations, informally but soon, to discuss issues raised this morning? A chat at 10 Downing street would be most welcome, appropriate and timely.

Mr. Aitken: I had better not assume for myself the role of my right hon. Friend's diary secretary, but I will certainly draw to his attention the remarks of the hon. Member for Thurrock and of the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe—who asked me to draw the substance of the whole debate to my right hon. Friend's attention, in his capacity as head of the Government and of the machinery of government. In some ways, this is a machinery of government issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport, who spoke with the authority of a former officer of the Gordon Highlanders, has had special dealings with the War Pensions Agency. I have already drawn attention to his tribute to that body. I am glad that he stressed the importance of the "How to Claim" booklet: we are working hard to ensure that the messages get across, and there has been a substantial jump in the number of claims being processed each year since the early 1990s as a result of more efficient work and better communication.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) announced what may have been an interesting new Liberal policy or just an interesting new Christchurch policy—I am not sure which. She suggested that there was a need to impose, by legislation, a statutory requirement on all local authorities in regard to war pensions disregard. That would cost money and have a budgetary impact. I was more worried, however, by another matter that was raised, amid

some controversy, on a point of order: according to the hon. Lady, the result of an appeal won by a constituent of hers had been disregarded by an unspecified agency. At one point she seemed to be saying that it was a Minister or the Government.

I assure the hon. Lady that there is no question of Ministers or the Government unfairly intervening in, or overturning, the decisions of statutory tribunals. Her allegation was unwise, and I hope that on reflection she will feel able to withdraw it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) emphasised the importance of resettlement programmes, after-sales service and housing. We have a proud record in that regard. We have taken a number of initiatives to encourage home ownership in the services and help to meet the needs of those leaving them: they include a new services home saving scheme, the sale of surplus married quarters at a discount and the establishment of a joint services housing advisory office.

That office was set up in September 1992, in response to a recommendation from our housing task force, to provide advice on the increasingly complex range of housing options open to service personnel. Its role is to provide a focal point—a phrase that has cropped up a number of times in the debate—giving housing advice to all serving personnel and to ex-service personnel who are still in married quarters.

It receives over 100 inquiries each week, and provides a comprehensive range of advice and guidance on housing options, working closely with local authorities and housing associations. It offers help and advice on the availability of local authority housing, housing association opportunities nationwide, MOD nominations to housing associations, the sale of surplus married quarters on the discount scheme and many other matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove asked a specific question about the housing trust that we are setting up. I can tell him that it will provide more flexibility in offering surplus married quarters for rent to ex-service personnel. The Government are taking well co-ordinated and effective action in regard to health, housing and war pension to help our ex-service men.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) told us in moving terms about his friend Mr. Leslie Bell of Moneymore, a 98-year-old gallant ex-soldier who is today commemorating the battle of the Somme on the battlefield. I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion by sending that gallant old soldier the good wishes of the House. The hon. Gentleman was right to remind us of the suffering of those who have served in the armed forces in Northern Ireland in both the regular Army and the Ulster Defence Regiment; I am glad that a voice from Northern Ireland was heard in that connection.

Like many other speakers, the hon. Member for Londonderry, East mentioned the need for a one-stop shop —another of the buzz words and phrases that kept appearing, along with "expediter" and "focal point". I was glad that his comments were followed by the realistic scepticism of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), who wondered whether such buzz words were likely to be any more effective than the existing machinery.

He emphasised—I was glad that someone did—how well the voluntary network of communication lines for ex-service men work, running through the regimental system, the British Legion, the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association and at least 150 other organisations. In an interesting intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West mentioned the mythical complainant, Mr. Joe Bloggs, who had a welfare problem and who scratched his head and asked, "Where should I go?" The notion that Mr. Joe Bloggs should somehow go instantly to the Minister was flattering to Ministers, but my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North got it right when he emphasised that Members of Parliament are as good a focal point or expediter as anyone. Asking a Minister to replace or work alongside those good channels will weaken them.

The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) sounded the only discordant note in the debate when he said that we do nothing for ex-service men and that we need a new Ministry—the biggest claim of the day—or an ombudsman.

Any partisan spirit was soon dispelled by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who talked about nuclear test veterans. We have all been concerned about those veterans. It must be emphasised again, however, that the incidence of death from cancer among veterans has been lower than among the general public and no higher than among any matched controlled group. That is shown in a report of the National Radiological Protection Board, which was published last December and a copy of which is in the House Library. It concluded that participation in the nuclear test programme has had no effect on life expectancy or the risk of developing cancer or any other fatal disease.

Mr. Donald Anderson: A potentially similar case exists in relation to Gulf war veterans. It is said that the United States Administration have changed their mind as a result of new medical evidence. Has the Ministry of Defence received such medical evidence and, if so, is it appraising it to see whether the Government should change their response?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has considered the matter carefully, but, to date, we have concluded that there is no single cause of the difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The hon. Gentleman's point is inappropriate to this debate.

My hon. Friends the Members for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) and for Worcester got to the kernel of the debate—whether the creation of a new sub-Department of Government is a good idea. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton asked about the risks of such a proposal leading to bad government. He was scathing, as I have been, saying that action rather than jargon was required. We are getting action and I enjoyed the best phrase of the debate—that any such designated Minister would be a postman with a red box but without a red van. I enjoyed that very much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester raised the philosophical question that lies at the heart of the issue: should we treat ex-service men differently from other members of society? As he said, they are in a unique category, but should their special status demand a change in the machinery of government? My answer to the thrust of the argument of the hon. Member for Thurrock is that, at first glance, it sounds attractive and interesting, but the attraction of establishing a single focal point with responsibility for all the needs of ex-service personnel is superficial. Like my hon. Friends the Members for

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Worcester, for Rutland and Melton and for Hertfordshire, North, I am not sure that that is a practical option or that it would result in better service for those personnel.

A new Department, sub-Department or special unit devoted exclusively to ex-service affairs could not resolve all the problems experienced by ex-service personnel. It would have no executive responsibility or power. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove asked, what authority would a Minister have who was just designated and who did not have proper departmental powers? He would have a nice title and a nice red box, but he would have no clout and no authority.

Ex-service men and women would still have their various health, housing and pension concerns dealt with by the specialist organisations, such as the local authorities or the War Pensions Agency, as at present. The co-ordinating body or sub-Department envisaged by the hon. Member for Thurrock could only, as has been said many times, act as a post office between ex-service personnel and the appropriate executive authority. That approach would simply add another small tier of administration and bureaucracy to the present system.

I am sure that, on reflection, few if any veterans would really want that. In parliamentary terms, the Minister concerned would find it extremely difficult to answer to the House for areas falling within the responsibility of other Departments, and the initiatives and services that I have already outlined and to which we attach considerable importance could be undermined.

The hon. Member for Thurrock began his speech with some references to Belloc. I commend to him another set of lines by Hilaire Belloc:

"And always keep a hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse."

That may be the answer to the hon. Gentleman.

One central fallacy ran through many speeches—the curious reference to the 17 Government Departments. That phrase crept into the circular sent out by the Royal British Legion. The word processor has whirred and the phrase has entered into the folklore of the debate. It presents a picture of the confused and oppressed veteran, lost in the Whitehall jungle wrestling with 17 different Departments. That is not merely an exaggeration, but a complete caricature. Almost nobody in the country wrestles with 17 Government Departments unless he is a Member of Parliament or the Cabinet Secretary—

Mr. William Ross: Or the Prime Minister.

Mr. Aitken: Or the Prime Minister.

The man on the Clapham omnibus—or the man in the Thurrock Royal British Legion club—would rarely have direct dealings with more than one or two Government Departments at the most. The notion that a veteran with a welfare problem has to bear in mind the Foreign Office, the Scottish Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Duchy of Lancaster, the Department of National Heritage and the Welsh Office is a glorious fantasy, built up by the word processor and recycled phrase after phrase. Even the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) used it with carefree irresponsibility. It is actually a reckless fantasy.

Unless something extraordinary is involved, the confused veteran will not find himself dealing with 17 Government Departments. However, it seems to be the basis of the case that we need a co-ordinating Minister to help the poor, lost veteran wrestle with 17 Government Departments. That idea does not stand up to serious examination and that is one reason for being less than sympathetic to the call so persuasively made today.

I now take up the theme of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester—the philosophical point about how much separation there should be of ex-service men from other members of society, especially those who have also served in dangerous situations. The number of people who have served in the armed forces is diminishing as a proportion of the total population and will continue to do so as the size of the services is reduced. It is therefore all the more important to ensure that the services remain integrated with the rest of the community.

The results of cultural isolation, administrative isolation or special status would be bad for society and bad for the services themselves. For the Government to set up machinery to deal with veterans' matters quite separately could run the risk that none of us wants—that of helping to create a division between people with military connections and the remainder of society.

For that reason and for the practical reasons on which I have dwelt, I firmly believe that welfare provision for the ex-service community should continue to be integrated with that for the nation as a whole. That is not to say that we should not look for improvements. We should always wish to improve our administration, but not necessarily by creating a new tier of administration for service men and women—improvement and expansion are not the same thing.

Our door is open to the Royal British Legion and other service organisations for further discussions. We would welcome a dialogue with them about administrative improvements and how best to make them. Certainly, we would always want such improvements. We are all in favour of greater co-ordination and co-operation on service men's affairs within government. However, for the reasons that I have tried to outline I cannot share the touching faith of the hon. Member for Thurrock in the efficacy of appointing a special Minister. We would be in danger of entering Jim Hacker territory—we want more administration, therefore we want a special administration unit to administer what is already being administered. I do not think that a sub-Department of state or even only a designated Minister would add up to any meaningful progress or improvement.

In a rather charming phrase, the hon. Gentleman suddenly said, "The nature of this debate is bouncing ideas off one another, is it not?" We have had a morning and afternoon doing just that. It has been a good House of Commons occasion and some good ideas have been floated. I do not wish to sound wholly negative. We have listened carefully to several of the points that have been made from both sides of the House. We will think about what has been said. I am afraid that I cannot go as far as the motion or the hon. Gentleman suggest, but I am grateful for the debate and for the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to good administration and good government for our ex-service men and women.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, mindful of the increasing needs of the United Kingdom's ageing ex-service population and the many problems of younger members of the ex-service community in direct consequence of Options for Change, considers that there is now

a pressing need for a sub-Department of Ex-Service Affairs within an existing Ministry and with a designated Minister to be responsible, as the only fundamental and long-term solution for the care and welfare of ex-service people and their dependants; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government now to respond positively to the Royal British Legion's urgent call for a sub-department to be established.

Property Markets

1.41 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that confidence within property markets and the construction industry is important to ensure sustained economic growth; considers that reforms of both the commercial and domestic property markets, and contractual arrangements within the construction industry, are essential to stimulate urban vitality and redevelopment; acknowledges the decision by the Lord Chancellor that reform of privity of contract is necessary; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to introduce early legislation to enact its policy on these matters.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) both on his good fortune in coming first in the ballot and on having had such an excellent debate at this important time when we commemorate the heroic deeds of 50 years ago. I am grateful to him for leaving sufficient time for me to introduce my motion. I am not sure whether there will be time for my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) to speak, but I shall be as brief as possible.

The motion originated from my interest in the issue of privity of contract, but it is drawn much wider than that. It embraces the importance of property markets and the construction industry. I am delighted to see the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment—my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry)—in his place. His work for the construction industry should be highly commended. Indeed, he has been described to me as the best Minister that the construction industry has ever had. I am not sure what will happen in the forthcoming reshuffle, but I hope that his very good work will be amply noted and that the importance of the construction industry within the Department of the Environment will continue to be given every priority.

In stressing the importance of markets, I was delighted this week to read a pamphlet by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) entitled "Civic Conservatism". In it, he stresses the importance of the markets, and I shall quote briefly from his brilliant exposition. He lucidly articulates the points that I had in mind in tabling my motion. The pamphlet states:

"The tragedy of 20th Century Britain has been the way in which the state has taken over and then drained the life blood from a series of institutions which stood between the individual and the government."

It also says:

"But equally we seem not to understand our own history and perpetually to fall a prey to the belief that we need our government to intervene to protect us from these dark, hostile, outside forces. As a result we are always on the lookout for the threat from market forces and are remarkably slow to see the greater danger posed for our civil society from the encroachment of the state."

It gives the following example:

"If we move on to look at the 1950s we can see the national mood was extraordinarily sensitive to fears about the damage done by free markets and remarkably relaxed about the damage done by big government. The pundits feared that commercial television was going to threaten our national culture. Looking back we can see that it was the destruction of the old communities by the enormous new public sector housing estates, a bipartisan policy trusting to big government, which did far more damage."

The report refers to the work of Professor Alice Coleman, saying:

"the desolation and alienation of an inner city estate is a direct consequence of the lack of clear property rights . . . The most powerful force for breaking down the barriers of discrimination

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

by sex or race or background is the market itself which will not want talents to go to waste."

It also describes how a ghetto can develop when

"people with drive, exceptional ability, self-confidence take their chance and move out".

My hon. Friend has brilliantly expressed the feelings that I have about the importance of markets. It is the need always to refer to the working of the market and to make the market work as well as possible that I shall stress today.

Before going any further, I draw attention to and declare an interest not only in the construction industry, and the electrical contracting industry in particular, but in the fact that I introduced a Landlord and Tenant Bill in 1987. That 10-minute rule Bill was successful in achieving its twin objectives, which were to improve the workings of the right-to-buy scheme and to provide proper market compensation for landlords whose properties were compulsorily purchased. The late Nicholas Ridley, who was Secretary of State for the Environment at the time, was able to incorporate the measures in my Bill into later legislation.

The British Property Federation has described the commercial property markets as being 60 per cent. rented, and the need for reform has been highlighted by numerous people. From my own experience of business, I know that privity of contract can suddenly rear its head years later when no one is aware of the liability. Recently, it was described in a Library reference note as "the sting in the tail". Mr. Steven Fogel, a solicitor who has done considerable work in this area, says that it is a law which gets up and bites people:

"The trouble with this law is that most people don't know about it or don't think about it until they get bitten. When it bites it usually bites hard."

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): I am obliged to my hon. Friend for giving way on that specific point. Does he agree that if the privity of contract rules were abolished it would be much more difficult for the assignment of leases to take place? Landlords would scrutinise more carefully potential new tenants who will be the only covenant on which they have to rely. Indeed, abolition of the rules might make it more difficult for people to come into leasehold businesses by virtue of having to climb a higher doorstep, as it were, in proving their creditworthiness to their landlords.

Mr. Thurnham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point and I shall come to that later.

It is the job of property developers to produce properties that people need, rather than ones that have to be forced down the throats of people who might not need them later. The proper working of the market will be improved if landlords look more to what future market needs will be.

Of course, only England and Wales have privity of contract. It does not apply in Scotland or in other countries in Europe and elsewhere, which seem to have well-developed and efficient property markets. Undoubtedly, it means that the courts will want to examine more carefully the strength of covenant for a following tenant. The Bill that I put forward would require the following tenant to be guaranteed by the first tenant if that is what the landlord requires, so there would be that degree of guarantee, but we would not have these nasty liabilities, which cannot be estimated, popping up much later. The chairman of the Property Market Reform Group, Mr. K. Manns, described it as

"a medieval law which has brought misery to thousands of families and small businesses, and its reform is long overdue."

There are other aspects of the property markets which also need reform and are the subject of a consultation exercise. Undoubtedly, my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to refer to the progress of that review. They include upwards-only rent reviews, which hardly seem to be what we want at a time when we are fighting inflation. They also include confidentiality clauses, which seem to go completely against the need for proper open markets, and there is a need for much better dispute resolution clauses.

I have had a considerable number of representations from many people about the need to reform the law of privity of contract. The Lord Chancellor has said that he wishes to see it reformed. The Law Reform Committee in 1988 made the first clear proposals, which included a retrospective element. The Lord Chancellor has not felt able to support that, but he has suggested a limit of nine months on the period during which a landlord can go back if he has delayed tracing a tenant on whom he intends to make demands. There have been dreadful cases in which demands have been made for long years before.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) to some of the dreadful abuses. An appalling scam came to light in May 1991. A tenant who was about to go bankrupt was induced by his landlord to sign a rent which was way above the true market rent. As he knew that he was about to go bankrupt, the tenant did not mind signing. He went bankrupt and was unable to pay. The landlord was then able to go back to all the previous tenants and force them to pay the rent way above the market value. When the case came to court, the judge was forced to find in favour of the landlord because of the state of the law. That was a clear abuse. It demonstrates as clearly as possible the need for reform.

The only people I know to have made representations in favour of keeping the law as it is are the representatives of the British Property Federation, and the Prudential Insurance Company. I believe that the British Property Federation accepts that there must be some reform. One hopes that it is looking properly to the competitiveness of Britain. The recent White Paper on competitiveness did not have a great deal to say about the construction industry, but the industry is obviously important, as it employs 1 million or more people. We need the property markets and the construction industry to work efficiently. At times I wonder whether the British Property Federation wants an inefficient construction industry to boost the value of its existing buildings, rather than one which might be able to produce buildings at a lower price.

Rather surprisingly, the Prudential Insurance Company said that it thought that reform of the law might put foreign investors off investing in Britain. As most foreign investors do not have such a law in their country, that would be surprising. The newspapers today show that the Prudential is a participant in a bid of more than £600 million for National Car Parks. It is putting in the equity. So it does not seem too worried about 25-year covenants when it comes to making its own investments.

I believe that the opposition from those elements of the industry is misplaced. If they look ahead, try to decide what property will be needed in future years and construct

properties in which they feel confident, they should not have to look to legal arrangements to ensure the value of their properties in the future.

The traders who occupy properties are in no position to judge what will be needed in 25 years. By the very nature of their businesses, they follow short-term trends in the market. They may be able to foresee their needs for relatively short periods ahead, but they will have no precise idea what their needs will be in 25 years. Traders are forced to take on a gamble. They take on a lease, gambling that they will be able to pass it on without anything bouncing back against them.

I have received letters from Sir Geoffrey Mulcahy, the chairman of Kingfisher, from the directors of Iceland Frozen Foods, from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and from representatives of the Confederation of British Industry. Those organisations said that they would support reform. I have been amazed to read some of the comments of the chief executive of Boots, Sir James Blyth, who said at a property seminar reported on 27 May:

"At present, the property industry bears analogy to the old, discredited economies of east Europe, where customers were provided with what the factories found most convenient to produce.

The property industry may have escaped scrutiny in the UK Department of Trade and Industry's white paper on competitiveness, but . . . it has no grounds for complacency.

At a time when the rest of the commercial world is becoming more flexible and responsive to customer needs, the property industry has become more rigid and uniform,. The industry has allowed itself to be dominated by the needs of its finances, leading to a lack of flexibility and innovation in the leases it offers tenants."

He went on to say:

"The possibility that the workings of the commercial property market damage the wider economy has been raised repeatedly over the past couple of years, by academics, businesses, lobby groups, the Bank of England and the government."

There seems to be ample evidence of the inadequacy of the existing law and the need to reform it. I have been much heartened by the support from both sides of the House. Early-day motion 1292, which I am sure that the Minister has seen, referring to the Landlord and Tenant (Covenants) Bill, has now been signed by 96 hon. Members, and I hope that there will be more than 100 names on it shortly.

It is significant that there has been no attempt to amend that early-day motion. I do not see any other hon. Members in the House today intending to speak against the measures in that Bill. So although the Bill has been blocked in earlier attempts to secure its Second Reading, those attempts represented a minority interest from the British Property Federation, which has been holding it up. I think that many members of the British Property Federation recognise the need to change the archaic law and it must be just a few diehards in that organisation who are holding up the matter.

A ten-minute Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) also touched on the subject earlier in the year. He too drew attention to the need for reforms. Obviously I shall be disappointed if my Bill does not manage to get through. Clearly it has become difficult to find time for it, but I hope that, if it is not successful, the Government will bring in a Bill in the next parliamentary Session and that that Bill will be as tough as the Government feel that it should be. The opponents of the Bill have had their moment to try to amend it. If they had wished to incorporate amendments in the Bill, I am sure that that would have been possible, but they have lost that chance. I hope that the Government will bring in a strong Bill in the coming year, along the lines already indicated by the Lord Chancellor.

I have already mentioned the good work of my hon. Friend the Minister in relation to the construction industry and also the work done by the Electrical Contractors Association. I have had the honour to represent that excellent association in the House for some 10 years. It has 2,200 employer members and 50,000 employees, representing 80 per cent. of an industry which has a total output of £3.4 billion. The ECA has played a leading role in bringing together groups of specialist subcontractors —the specialist engineering contractors group and the constructors liaison group—bringing specialist interests together overall. My hon. Friend once described it as an alphabet soup, but we have been able to get through that stage to the point at which valuable work is being done.

I also praise the Minister for the work that he did in enabling the review of construction industry contractual arrangements to take place, under Sir Michael Latham. We are all very pleased with the progress made to date, including the interim report, and we expect the final report to come out in the next few days. I hope that there will be an opportunity for the House to debate the report before the recess. In any event, we look forward to an early Government response to the recommendations in Sir Michael Latham's report.

In preparing that report, I do not think that Sir Michael Latham has had time to see an interesting proposal which came to light the other day from Professor Colin New of the Cranfield school of management on the question of payment of late debts. That has always been a particular problem for specialist contractors in the construction industry.

I hope that the Minister may have had a chance to see the article that I sent through to his office earlier today, showing that the proposal suggests that any bill not paid within 30 days of the due date on the invoice would not count as a VAT input. That would have a remarkable effect on people's behaviour because no one would want to pay, in effect, a 17.5 per cent. tax for late payment. At the same time, the charge would not affect small firms which are below the VAT threshold. The proposal would therefore help many small firms and not hinder them in the way that other proposals to legislate against late payment run the risk of doing.

I ask the Minister to look at that new proposal, which I commend Professor New for making. I hope that it may suggest a way forward for resolving a long-standing source of discontent not only in the construction industry, but industry and commerce throughout the country, particularly small businesses.

Without taking up too much of the remaining time, I should like to comment briefly on one or two other points in the motion. On housing, my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that a pamphlet by me entitled "Choose your landlord" was published last year by the Conservative Political Centre. It pressed the case for private landlords to play a much larger role in the provision of housing, particularly in moving housing from local authority control into the private sector.

On 5 May 1993, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in the Harry Simpson memorial lecture:

"There's clearly a need for a larger private rented sector in Britain."

We all look forward to that. The latest figures, just released

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by the Department of the Environment, show that an extra 250,000 homes have been privately let in the past five years, which suggests that the decades-long decline in the private rented sector is at last being reversed. That has been achieved by, in particular, the successful legislation that the Government introduced in 1988 to improve the workings of the domestic rental market.

If we can bring private landlords into the council estates, that will introduce an element of entrepreneurship and alter the way in which people think on those estates. I accept, however, that on 17 June my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction said in a speech to the Chartered Institute of Housing:

"Finding landlords to take on responsibility for a good proportion of the 4 million council stock would be a tall order."

We could make a lot of progress and set about changing some of the attitudes that my hon. Friend the Member for Havant described so well in his pamphlet by bringing market forces to bear properly in the council estates. We should not be afraid of doing that. We should look at it as a positive way in which to alter attitudes so that people on council estates can develop their own job opportunities and establish a wider range of contacts to help them to develop their own lives.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend will have time to comment further on the development of the housing market, but many people look to housing investment trusts as one way in which to attract new capital.

We cannot expect to make much progress in improving the private rented sector without giving some thought to how housing benefit should develop. My hon. Friend may know that I am working on a further pamphlet with Professor David Marsland to look at housing benefit more as an area entitlement rather than a personal entitlement.

I commend the motion to the House and I hope that there will be further opportunities to debate the points that I have put forward. I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister's response. Perhaps there will also be sufficient time for my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding to contribute to the debate, should he catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

2.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) has introduced a timely debate on the property and construction industries. I thank him for his kind personal comments, which were much appreciated.

The provision of high-quality business and industrial premises is an essential prerequisite of a competitive economy. The property industry makes a substantial contribution to the general economy in terms of jobs and wealth creation. Property investments started to show recovery and improved performance in 1993. That has continued so far this year, with a considerable weight of funds competing for prime propositions in all sectors of the market—retail, office and industrial.

Demand is increasing, with a corresponding fall in vacancy rates. That fall reflects the strengthening and continuing recovery of the economy, with low inflation and low interest rates. I am told that, in some areas, levels of prime stock have fallen so far that developers are now dusting off their plans. A few property companies have made encouraging starts in speculative development, including office developments in London and elsewhere and some retail and industrial warehouse projects.

As I go around the country from city to city—I was in Birmingham this week, Newcastle last week and shall be in Sheffield next week—I discover that the story is much the same: increasing confidence, strengthening recovery and continuing property investment are starting to take hold firmly. Bank loans outstanding to property companies have fallen significantly since their peak in May 1991. Confidence is improving and a number of banks are again looking carefully at property ventures—albeit, quite properly, selectively and on sensible loan-to-value ratios. The property industry can therefore regard the future with much greater optimism. Building on the substantial recent progress, there is every prospect of a sound, non-inflationary recovery in the commercial property sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East has made an interesting contribution on privity, a subject in which he has taken a considerable interest. As he made clear, that aspect of our law has concerned many people throughout the country, particularly those with small businesses.

Last year, my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor set out the Government's policy, which is that the Law Commission's recommendations contained in its report on privity should be implemented with two important changes: first, implementation should be limited to new rather than existing leases. I hope that that will go a considerable way towards reassuring those who are concerned that any reform that we make to the privity law may destabilise the market. We are considering only new contracts, so anyone entering a new contract would do so in the knowledge of the changes to the privity law.

The second new requirement applies to existing as well as new leases. A notice of arrears would be served on any former tenant from whom it is intended to recover funds within nine months of the sum in question becoming due. As my hon. Friend quite fairly made clear, one of the difficulties of the privity law is that people often do not know about its impact until they are served with a writ. Sometimes they do not know about it until long after they have signed the lease in question.

I hope that the two changes that we have announced to the Law Commission's recommendations are sensible. They have been taken in the light of what people had to say and should meet general agreement. It remains our intention to introduce further legislation in those terms as soon as a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

Should any hon. Member seek to create an opportunity by means of a private Member's Bill, we would consider carefully how far we could extend support for such a Bill, depending on the extent to which the Bill accorded with settled policy. As my hon. Friend said, he attempted to pilot such a Bill to give effect to the policy that I have outlined. The number of hon. Members' signatures on the early-day motion shows the widespread support from both sides of the House for his Bill.

Despite expressions of support for the principles of the Bill, however, it has been unable to make progress. I know that there are those who remain nervous about the possible effects on the property market of any change, despite our decision to limit the reforms to new leases. We are willing to consider and to listen to ideas on how the reforms might be improved, and I hope that a consensus can be achieved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East can be assured that, in due course, when legislative proposals are brought before Parliament, we will want to ensure that they meet the necessary requirements so that there is stability within the property market and a fair balance between landlords' needs and tenants' rights. That is what we are seeking to achieve.

I know that there has been much concern about issues relating to commercial leasing—notably, upward-only rent reviews, confidentiality clauses and dispute resolution procedures. That was why we issued a consultation paper last year. The subjects are complex, so it was not surprising that we received a considerable number of submissions and comments on our proposals. We in government have been giving careful consideration to the complex and difficult issues, and we want and hope to announce the outcome as soon as possible. We understand that the commercial property world is keen to hear of the outcome of the review.

The construction industry is vital to our economy, with which its health is inextricably entwined. The British construction industry's output is £45 billion to £50 billion a year. When taken together with the construction materials and products sectors, the construction industry is equivalent to about one tenth of the national gross domestic product, one third of the manufacturing output and 50 per cent. of fixed investment. The industry is very important, which is why every official and Minister in the Department of the Environment, which sponsors the construction industry, is determined to do everything possible to help it prosper and to influence events to ensure the greatest prosperity for the United Kingdom construction industry here and abroad.

For the past few months the construction industry has been enjoying a period of sustained growth, which is expected to settle at a rate of some 2 to 3 per cent. a year. In the past six months, there has been an increase in construction output. The value of new orders in the 12 months to April this year was 10 per cent. higher than a year earlier. We do not want a return to the sort of boom conditions of the late 1980s, because they often led to a subsequent bust. We want a pattern of steady and sustained growth. That has clearly begun to emerge to the benefit of the construction industry as a whole.

Following heavy cost cutting during the recession, the construction market remains highly competitive. British firms are well placed to compete abroad and are performing well abroad. Exports of building materials and components rose 13 per cent. at the end of last year, cutting the trade gap by 7 per cent. Trade in manufactured products and components is in the black for the first time in years, which is good news. With inflation at historically low levels, interest rates at a 22-year low, and GDP, manufacturing output and consumer spending showing sustained improvements, the general climate for United Kingdom construction continues to look excellent.

We in government will continue to do everything in our power and influence to assist the United Kingdom construction industry to take full advantage of the opportunities available here and overseas. Last year, together with the construction industry, we carried out a review of the Department of the Environment's sponsorship functions in the light of the challenges facing the industry as a result of the recession. We took account of the widely held view that the construction industry needed to do more to try to improve its efficiency, quality and competitiveness.

One of the problems that we have had in the past has been liaising with the large number of representational organisations in the industry. My hon. Friend aptly described them as alphabet soup, which is how they often appear to Ministers and officials. There must be well over 100 trade associations and professional institutions, some of which represent quite small numbers of companies or people. We have had to cope with large numbers of ad hoc requests for meetings and visits that often overlap. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that, over the past couple of years, much progress has been made.

We now have three umbrella bodies which between them represent almost all the associations and institutions —the Construction Industry Council, the Construction Industry Employers Council, and the construction liaison group. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East had a positive hand in helping to set up the CLG. These umbrella bodies were a major help to us during our review of sponsorship. They are helping us to set up regular consultation arrangements, which represent a big improvement on the former ad hoc demands for meetings. I very much thank everyone involved for the constructive way in which they have worked together with the construction sponsorship directorate in the DOE.

The review concluded that we needed to improve information exchange with the industry and to put increased effort into promoting innovation and competitiveness. So our sponsorship functions were relaunched as the construction sponsorship directorate last September, with a determination to listen to the industry's concerns and views, to explain Government policies so that the industry is clear about our objectives, to act as the industry's advocate in Whitehall, in government and wherever else we may be needed at home and abroad, and to promote exports, innovation and productivity.

A large number of officials in the construction sponsorship directorate will spend time on attachment to the construction industry, so that they can understand as closely as possible the challenges facing the industry. I am also glad to say that the industry itself is starting to send an increasing number of secondees to work with us in the directorate. That will also enable us to understand the needs of industry better—and enable them to have a better appreciation of the machinery of government.

It is clear that a great deal of progress has been made since the launch of the construction sponsorship directorate. Ministers and officials are grateful for the plaudits for the directorate's work that have come from every quarter of the industry, as my hon. Friend noted. We find it both challenging and stimulating to work in close partnership with the industry, and Ministers and all the directorate's officials are determined to have the best possible working relationship with all parts of the construction industry.

We have set up arrangements for regular consultations. These include a twice-yearly state of the industry report, produced jointly by the Department and the industry. It forms the basis for discussions between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, Ministers and senior construction industry representatives. We were getting frustrated with the continuous debate about the exact state of the industry, often based on one or two statistics produced by one or two trade groups. Now we have an

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agreed state of the industry report. There are also regular fortnightly briefing meetings on specific topics between the industry and me, enabling me to hear the industry's views at first hand.

We have also established a new consultative group for Government and industry, which meets regularly to discuss issues and concerns at official level. Finally, we are publishing a new monthly newsletter, entitled "Construction Monitor", which contains the latest European, United Kingdom and statistical information. It is distributed through *Building* magazine so as to reach the largest possible readership.

We have been working closely with the industry to ensure that we achieve what the United Kingdom wants on the European Union construction products directive. We have taken a number of other steps to improve our sponsorship activities. Last week I launched a new construction benchmarking challenge, which aims to promote innovation and best practice by encouraging construction industry trade associations and companies to co-operate in benchmarking schemes. An improved range of statistics is being produced to help industry decision makers, and a joint group has been established to advise my Department, so that the statistics we produce offer the industry the best possible advice.

We are promoting research and innovation in a number of ways. A whole industry strategy group has been set up to develop a joint strategy with the industry and to help ensure that resources are used as effectively as possible. The Department of the Environment is spending £25 million a year on construction research, of which £5 million is allocated to collaborative projects funded jointly with the industry. In every aspect, we are seeking to ensure that the industry is as competitive as possible.

My hon. Friend mentioned the industry's important concern that its competitiveness has been undermined by conflict within the industry. That is one reason why we established the Latham review, ably chaired by our former colleague, Sir Michael Latham, which is due to report later this month. As my hon. Friend said, the interim report is extremely encouraging. I have no doubt that the Latham report will have much to say to us in government, in our role as procurers of construction services, and to the industry. We shall certainly want to respond as positively as possible to what is said by Sir Michael and his team of assessors. All in the industry keenly look forward to the report's publication.

The industry is concerned not only about conflict but about late payment. My hon. Friend specifically drew attention to a proposal to withhold value added tax refunds to penalise late payers. Withholding VAT refunds due to those who delay payments to other companies, and particularly to small firms, is an ingenious and worthy attempt to right a wrong. However, it has the sort of disadvantages that exist with other legislative solutions.

It would inevitably place a greater administrative burden on firms, which might be disproportionate for those most affected—that is, small companies—and would require considerable policing and investigatory resources. It would also be a new development in using taxation policy as a punitive measure in commercial relationships. I have no doubt that Sir Michael will comment on that issue. The recent excellent White Paper on competitiveness made a number of positive recommendations that will help to deal with late payment and should encourage prompt payment.

I hope that I have demonstrated the importance that the Government attach to the property and construction industries; that the Government acknowledge the significance of those industries' contribution to the economy; and that the Government have a clear commitment to fostering, developing and promoting effective working relationships with the construction industry, to help improve its efficiency and competitive edge and to ensure that it is the best in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises that confidence within property markets and the construction industry is important to ensure sustained economic growth; considers that reforms of both the commercial and domestic property markets, and contractual arrangements within the construction industry, are essential to stimulate urban vitality and redevelopment; acknowledges the decision by the Lord Chancellor that reform of privity of contract is necessary; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to introduce early legislation to enact its policy on these matters.

Deepings and Stamford Bypasses

2.22 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the widespread support for the long-awaited bypasses for Deepings and Stamford in South Lincolnshire; notes that these roads would result in fewer casualties in road accidents and reduced noise and other pollution in residential areas; looks forward to the improvements to the quality of life for residents of Deepings and Stamford that would be brought about by these roads; believes that these bypasses are essential if the economic growth of South Lincolnshire is to be maintained; considers that it is in the national interest that the great historic and architectural heritage of Stamford, the first conservation area in the United Kingdom, is preserved and protected from the blight and depredations of heavy through traffic; supports the case for the urgent imposition of a weight restriction on vehicles traversing Stamford's ancient town bridge; and urges that the Highways Agency should give both bypass schemes the highest priority.

I am grateful for the opportunity to move the motion and to raise the issue of Deepings and Stamford bypasses, the related issue of weight restrictions on Stamford bridge, and the wider issue of roads in south Lincolnshire.

The inadequacy of our roads for the burdens placed on them is far and away the greatest and most sensitive local issue in south Lincolnshire, and has been for years. One peculiarity of south Lincolnshire is that, since the invention of the motor car, only one new road has been constructed —the A1, in the 1960s. Another road, the Spalding bypass, is under construction, but the lack of provision of road infrastructure contrasts sharply with most parts of the country, whether the south-east, the north, Scotland or elsewhere.

The consequence is that south Lincolnshire's roads are woefully inadequate for the needs of the time. Traffic is constantly stalled in jams, and small towns and villages are bearing a burden of constant, heavy through traffic throughout the day, which it is unreasonable to expect local people to bear. There is also a great problem with pollution and noise in residential areas. Businesses tell me that they are frequently deterred from investing in what is otherwise a most attractive part of the world because of the inadequacy of road communications and the time that it takes for a lorry to get to a workshop or plant.

Worst of all, of course, is the human problem of accidents. There have been some very bad accidents recently, a number of them involving children. Children have been killed. In the past few days there has been a very sad accident in Deepings involving a small girl; fortunately she was not killed, but a constituent from whom I received a letter yesterday wrote that the thud of the poor child's head on the windscreen of the car that hit her was a sound that she hoped never to hear again. It is strongly felt that we should have the new roads that have been so woefully lacking.

I was greatly encouraged when, following a number of conversations between myself and Lord Parkinson—then Secretary of State for Transport—provision was made in the 1988 Government road programme for a Stamford bypass relief road and a Deepings bypass. Subsequently, the plan for a Stamford bypass was set aside pending decisions on the upgrading of the A1 to motorway status, and no progress has been made over the past four of five years. That was very disappointing. Next came a bolt from the blue, which caused enormous consternation in Stamford: the bypass was simply taken out of the Government's road programme when it was revised in March this year.

As for Deepings, it has been waiting for a bypass since the 1930s; I believe that the initial plans date from 1931. Again, it was greatly encouraging when the bypass was included in the 1988 Government road programme, and construction was expected to start this year. There was just as much consternation, therefore, when it was decided not to exclude the bypass from the road programme altogether but to place it in category 3 of the Highway Agency's new priority system.

My hon. Friend the Minister, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), has been extremely sympathetic to the many representations that I have made to him, and visited both Stamford and Deepings a few weeks ago—visits that were greatly appreciated by local residents. He has been able to reassure me on a number of matters in the past few days, for which I am deeply grateful. I told him that, because of the short time available and the assurances that he had already given me, the last thing I wanted was for him to spend the morning here when he had urgent business elsewhere.

My hon. Friend has assured me that he will issue orders to place a weight restriction on Stamford bridge, the ancient bridge—Stamford's only one—that runs through the centre of that historic town. Such action will immediately provide some welcome relief. My hon. Friend has given me an undertaking that the possibility of returning the Stamford bypass to the Government road programme, with a view to relatively rapid construction, will be considered at the next opportunity—at the beginning of next year.

I have also heard from my hon. Friend's officials that they are urgently considering—on his direct instructions —the possibility of giving the Deepings bypass a measure of priority. That, I think, is considered thoroughly warranted by everyone in south Lincolnshire and, indeed, every expert who has viewed the situation from outside.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on a matter that remains extremely pertinent, and for the understanding and support of the Minister and his officials.

2.23 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): My constituency contains a few streets on the very edge of Stamford. It will come as no surprise that my constituents, too, have not been slow in writing to me about the problems that they encounter, such as congestion, when driving into Stamford. However, I am happy to play second fiddle to my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) —not just because most of the problems that beset us are more in his constituency than mine, but because the manner in which he has taken up the issue on behalf of his constituents provides a case study of how it should be done. Any student of parliamentary behaviour should study the manner in which he has represented his constituents, which is an example of how a case can be brought to Ministers' attention and action taken.

I have enough problems in my constituency in trying to get the Oakham bypass, but my hon. Friend's constituents and mine will be pleased to hear the news that my hon. Friend gave the House of the very good prospect of placing proper weight restrictions on the streets through Stamford.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Bills

RACIAL HATRED AND VIOLENCE BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [11 March].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 8 July.

FAIR TREATMENT FOR WIDOWERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 July.

NURSERY EDUCATION (ASSESSMENT OF NEED) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [18 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 15 July.

PARDON FOR SOLDIERS OF THE GREAT WAR BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 July.

LANDLORD AND TENANT (COVENANTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 15 July.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL

Order read for further consideration (as amended in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

To be further considered upon Monday 4 July.

SPORTS (DISCRIMINATION) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

WATER (DOMESTIC DISCONNECTIONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [25 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 8 July.

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES (NO. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 July.

CONSOLIDATION, &C., BILLS

Motion made, and Question put,

That, in respect of the Value Added Tax Bill [*Lords*] and the Vehicle Excise and Registration Bill [*Lords*], notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bills have been read a second time.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Hon Members: Object.

Disabled People (Mobility)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): This debate is about the urgency of the need to end a specific, blatant and now totally indefensible injustice to people —children and adults alike—who are among the most severely disabled in Britain today. What they seek, but cannot achieve without the help of this House, is every other citizen's undoubted right to independent personal mobility—the freedom to go beyond their own front doors.

With backing from the Muscular Dystrophy Group of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and from more than 100 other voluntary organisations, I have tabled an early-day motion in the following terms:

"That this House calls urgently for the provision of indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs to all permanently disabled adults and children requiring them for independent mobility, in accordance with recommendations made by the DSS Working Party chaired by Professor (now Lord) Ian McColl in 1986."

Judging from the strong and immediate all-party response that my motion received, the subject is one of urgent concern to right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. More importantly, though, the motion is of paramount concern to thousands of severely disabled people who see themselves as victims of state-sanctioned discrimination. That is the only way properly to describe the failure to fund occupier-controlled, electrically powered, indoor-outdoor wheelchairs for disabled people, who are forced to stay trapped in their own homes without them.

It is estimated that at present there are approximately half a million permanently disabled adults and children in the United Kingdom who require a wheelchair of one kind or another for basic mobility. The state provides wheelchairs free of charge, and without any means testing, for the vast majority of them. This creates the presumption that the state acknowledges a duty to provide the means of independent mobility for all its disabled citizens. But for a significant proportion of permanently disabled people—as many as 40,000 to 50,000 children and adults according to the latest study—the range of chairs commonly available fails to meet their needs. Their disabilities are of such severity that they simply do not have the upper body strength to self-propel the manual wheelchair the state will provide, and the indoor electric-powered wheelchair, which can also be obtained free of charge, is simply not powerful enough to take them across the thresholds of their own homes and allow them to live their lives in the way that millions of other citizens can do, as of right, each and every day.

They never go beyond their own four walls independently, unless they can raise enough money to buy chairs themselves and that is seldom easy for people, so many of whom are locked in the benefits system and unable to work because they cannot get to work. The only other way for them to achieve independent personal mobility is to face what many of them see as the indignity of seeking help from charities. They seek the help of charities like the Muscular Dystrophy Group, whose recently launched "Batteries Not Included" campaign to secure mandatory state funding for indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs has placed new emphasis on this injustice.

When, in 1986, the working party chaired by Professor, now Lord, Ian McColl made its recommendations, it seemed that at last the inequity of a system that gave no help to those most in need would be finally swept away. McColl clearly recommended that indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs should be made available through the state system. His report was unequivocal in claiming that the sole reason for continuing to deny access to these chairs was "financial". He condemned this as blinkered and flawed because it took no account of the invisible economic effects of fully empowering disabled people to contribute to the economy on the basis of equal opportunities.

The report envisaged a sound and common-sense policy of turning more and more tax users into taxpayers. It was a report, then, that called in compelling terms for a complete overhaul of a system that was outdated, financially near-sighted and a betrayal of those most in need. Yet eight years on there has been no change in the wheelchair service in England and Wales. Indeed, the dismantling of the old network of artificial limb and appliance centres—ALACs—and their replacement by a devolved system of administration by individual district health authorities has resulted in still more glaring anomalies, inconsistencies and inequities.

The Minister may say that it is now for local health authorities and trusts, and them alone, to decide whether to supply indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs, but most other people will insist that the Government cannot simply wash their hands of a problem that is so crucial to the most needful of severely disabled people. They demand an act of leadership from Richmond house.

As the Minister must know, the fact that a few isolated authorities in England and Wales offer limited funding for the wheelchairs we seek only heightens the mounting sense of frustration and anger felt by severely disabled people who live in adjacent authorities where no such option is available.

The case of Wesley Maynard of Dorset, who has just emerged from a two-year period of isolation, tells the story in human terms. The increasingly debilitating nature of the form of muscular dystrophy which affects him meant that he could no longer operate a manual wheelchair. The state was not prepared to offer a powered alternative which would take him out of his home. Not only was Wesley's life cruelly restricted by his immobility, but his children's lives were, too. In Wesley's own words:

"It's not fair on the boys. At weekends we should be out and about, having fun together. The beach is only a mile away, but it may as well be a hundred miles for all we'll see of it."

Fortunately, Wesley's story has a happy ending. Recently, thanks to grants from the Muscular Dystrophy Group and a number of local fund-raising organisations, he finally received the necessary funds to purchase an indoor-outdoor powered wheelchair.

The Muscular Dystrophy Group's files are full of similar stories of people whose lives have been completely transformed by the acquisition of indoor-outdoor wheelchairs. The charity's excellent report into the wheelchair service contains testimony from many individuals as to the dramatic effect of having an indoor-outdoor chair on their quality of life.

Richard Plummer, from West Brompton in London, says:

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"The chair has completely transformed my life. The ability to go out, when and wherever I want, is a new experience for me".

Michelle Howard from Swindon says:

"When I got into my wheelchair, I realised what freedom meant. It was like having my legs back; in fact it was better than my legs—my legs working without the rest of me would be useless."

Finally, and most succinctly, the words of Andrew Doddington, a 13-year-old from Norwich who has muscular dystrophy, who simply declares:

"My wheels are my freedom."

Yet for every story of freedom achieved, there are others of freedom denied. Again, the Muscular Dystrophy Group's own files are full of examples. Catherine Alexander, for example, is a bright and inquisitive four-year-old from the Wirral. At present her mobility is severely limited. When it comes to exploring the world around her she is dependent upon others and reliant upon a pushchair she has now outgrown.

Mark Thorpe is a 32-year-old from Harwich, whose current powered chair, paid for by voluntary sources, is now eight years old and totally unreliable. Mark recalls the period before he got his first powered chair as one of isolation and despair. Quite rightly, he dreads the imminent prospect of being trapped in his home again and reliant on others for basic mobility.

The list goes on and on. Indeed, since 1986 the Muscular Dystrophy Group alone has provided grants for powered wheelchairs to well over 1,000 adults and children, representing an investment in excess of £2 million. That money had to be diverted from the charity's primary objective, which is the funding of vitally important research into the cause and potential treatment of this debilitating and harrowing condition. Many severely disabled people take on the arduous and often hopeless task of raising funds themselves. They write letter after letter to local and national trusts and charities, waiting for the reply to fall through their door that might prove the financial key to opening it for them.

On both sides of the House, their plight is seen as shaming our society. How can it possibly be right to perpetuate a system under which, in proportion to individual need, the more disabled one is, the less help one receives? It is a system that piles handicap on handicap, leaving disabled people doubly disabled, and is morally unacceptable.

Again, is it right that a child in my Manchester constituency must remain isolated and dependent upon others for basic mobility when his exact counterpart in Motherwell, where state funding for indoor-outdoor wheelchairs has already been agreed, enjoys full independence as of right?

Why is individual need less important than where one lives in determining eligibility for help? As the Minister knows, that has been the case since 1992, when the Scottish Office made ring-fenced funding available for indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs.

The Scottish experience provides the one glimmer of hope in this whole shaming and scandalous affair. Far from demonstrating that funding for indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs would prove administratively and financially too difficult to contemplate in the rest of the United Kingdom, in fact it clearly demonstrates the opposite. The state-financed system now operating in Scotland has proved wholly viable. The Scottish scheme also contradicts the only argument ever offered in defence of current policy south of the border that to make funding available for indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs would open the floodgates to new applicants on a scale that would be financially prohibitive.

Indeed, a recent memorandum from the Scottish Office makes it clear that the Secretary of State now accepts that current eligibility criteria are too narrowly drawn. The memorandum recommends a relaxation in the criteria now operating in Scotland, with no mention of any fear of being deluged by new applicants.

For the period 1994-95, the sum of £1.2 million has been set aside in Scotland for the specific purpose of providing indoor-outdoor wheelchairs—a sum which is obviously proving more than ample to meet current applicants' needs. Simple arithmetic, multiplying the figure of £1.2 million in proportion to population statistics for the United Kingdom as a whole, produces a national annual figure of just £12.25 million to extend the system to the rest of Great Britain.

This is wildly at variance with the Government's own figures. As long ago as 1986, the McColl report called for a budget of £30 million for national funding of indoor-outdoor wheelchairs, but that figure, in the light of Scottish experience, now seems to have been cautiously high.

Just £12.25 million is surely a small price to pay to secure full rights of citizenship, freedom of mobility and economic liberation for the severely disabled people whom this debate is seeking to help.

I take pride in being associated with the Muscular Dystrophy Group and the other 100 organisations which are collectively mounting the "Batteries Not Included" campaign, with most of which I have been associated for more than 25 years. On their behalf, and for the thousands of needful people whose lives can be transformed, I now most strongly urge the Government both to acknowledge, once and for all, the state's duty to guarantee independent personal mobility for all its disabled citizens, and to end the now plainly indefensible policy of overt discrimination.

In the introduction to "Batteries Not Included"—the report which inspired this debate—my noble Friend Lord Attenborough of Richmond-upon-Thames, the Muscular Dystrophy Group's president, states:

"Independent mobility is not the privilege of the able-bodied or of those with the necessary financial means. It is a fundamental right—and a duty lies with society as a whole to ensure that this right is available to all.

Establishing a system to provide indoor/outdoor wheelchairs would cost so little and buy so much. All that is lacking is a strong voice calling for change and the political will to make that change."

There are now many thousands of very strong, very insistent voices calling for change. Is it not about time that we in this House heeded their call by summoning the political will to make that change?

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) shared many debates with me before he became a Minister—we were invariably on the same side—and he has shown his humanity on many occasions in the House. I hope very much that he will be able to offer a positive reply today—one that will give some hope to people who so very urgently need our help.

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for his final words and I am grateful for the opportunity to answer the debate. The House is well aware of the right hon. Gentleman's tireless campaigning over the years on behalf of people with disabilities. As he says, I too have been involved in many campaigns, often alongside him. So I welcome this opportunity to share some thoughts with him on the points that he aired today.

There are a number of ways in which people with disabilities can receive help with their mobility. The benefits system provides a mobility component in the disabled living allowance. People can use this to meet their own needs for getting around, or may put it towards the lease or purchase of a car, or, if they are on the higher level of mobility component, towards the purchase of indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs under the Motability scheme. In addition, the Department of Employment has power to award money to resolve mobility problems so that a disabled person can start work. Access standards for new non-domestic buildings also play their part in increasing mobility.

Clearly no description of the cross-sector aspects of mobility would be complete without mention of public transport. A number of initiatives are currently in progress covering buses, air travel, taxis and the pedestrian environment. Perhaps I can underscore that last point. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I have been involved with people in wheelchairs and people who have visual impairment, so I know how difficult life can be as a result of poor planning and thoughtless practices. Dark-painted lamp posts at irregular intervals do not help. Shop goods spilling over on to the pavements, cars and bicycles parked on kerbs or across ramps, and tools and workings left unguarded can all be lethal. It does not take Governments to get these right; it takes all of us to think, and to think disability.

Accessible transport within a barrier-free pedestrian environment should address the needs of all the population with mobility difficulties, without, of course, focusing on any one group to the exclusion or detriment of others. The Department of Transport is given valuable support in pursuing developments in this area by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee. The committee was set up under the Transport Act 1985 to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on the transport needs of people with disabilities. People with disabilities make up the majority on the committee and cover the whole spectrum of disability needs. They bring together a wealth of experience and expertise in transport matters.

"Co-ordination" is a word that is increasingly used in the context of accessible transport, and it is an area in which I think there is enormous scope for further development. Many local and health authorities are now beginning to realise the value of pooling accessible transport resources so that statutory transport provision, for example, to day centres, hospital appointments, special schools and so on, can be combined with other sorts of door-to-door transport services either using community transport or dial-a-ride vehicles, or using local taxi services where they have suitable, or suitably modified, vehicles.

Many would regard my responsibility in the area as the most basic and important to the mobility of many disabled people. I am responsible for the wheelchair service. The service has a proud history. It has grown from issuing some 76,000 wheelchairs in 1979 to issuing 170,000 last year.

For many years, the artificial limb and appliance service was run centrally. In 1986, the McColl report of the committee chaired by my noble Friend Lord McColl reviewed the service and proposed sweeping changes in the way it was run. As a result, responsibility for artificial limbs and wheelchairs was transferred to the Disablement Services Authority from 1 July 1987. The main function of the Disablement Services Authority was to prepare the service for integration within the national health service, which took place in April 1991.

Following integration, as the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe said, the money to be spent on disablement services was earmarked to ensure that it was not put to other uses, and to accustom the NHS to running the service. When that arrangement ceased on 1 April 1993, the NHS became entirely responsible for running the service.

The result of the changes is to integrate provision of wheelchairs with other services for disabled people so that local health authorities and disablement services centres can ensure that the health needs of their populations are met. They are closest to the people they serve and so are best placed to respond sensitively to their needs. Choice is improved, as disablement services centres may buy any wheelchair on the market within their overall budget.

Since devolution of responsibility, each health authority has made its own arrangements for the service. Generally, people who need a wheelchair are referred by their GP or consultant to a local disablement services centre. That centre is contracted to provide the person with a suitable wheelchair. Therapists at the centre prescribe the appropriate chair from a range of types on NHS contract, from a manual chair at £130 to a powered indoor chair costing £750. Alternatively, of course, they can order on the open market what is required. When necessary, special seating and attachments are also provided. Chairs are maintained under local agreements and the disabled person pays nothing for the service.

Powered indoor chairs are provided for severely disabled people, who normally live alone, to help them move about their home. Powered chairs that can operate both indoors and outdoors are more versatile and, of course, more expensive, at about £2,500 and ranging up to £20,000. As with standard wheelchair provision, health authorities have to decide whether to issue them in the light of local priorities and resources, and a few have allocated funding specifically for the purpose.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the provision in Scotland is different, as it is with a number of services. In England, we have taken the view that local units are best placed to meet the needs of local people, as in other areas of health and social care provision. The changes in Scotland are recent and I shall watch them with interest and watch the progress of their three-year programme very carefully.

For the future, we expect the demand for wheelchairs to rise. In 1978-79, almost 270,000 were in use. Recent figures show that well over 500,000 wheelchairs are now in use. The current cost of the wheelchair service is nearly £40 million a year. The House will realise from that that there have been many improvements and changes in the organisation of that service over the past few years. I am

[Mr. John Bowis]

keeping the new arrangements under scrutiny to ensure that our aims—to improve the service and make it more responsive—are achieved.

We have received a number of suggestions for fuller development of wheelchair provision over the years, including, for example, the introduction of a voucher scheme. Under such a scheme, disabled people would be able to use a voucher to the value of their NHS provision and top that up, if they so wished, with or without help from family, friends or charitable organisations, to purchase a more expensive wheelchair. That scheme has attractions, especially to disabled people who are active, able to look after themselves and not otherwise ill. There are, of course, a number of practical considerations to be worked through and we would need to be sure that costs would not be prohibitive.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be encouraged to learn that, as a result of correspondence I have had with my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), I have today asked the Department to look afresh at the issue, so that I can decide whether a scheme would be affordable and to the benefit of users generally. I am setting up a departmental working group to look at all aspects of such a scheme and to take evidence from experts. That will report to me by the end of October.

I should also like to draw the attention of the House to a report which was launched recently on the subject of cross-sector benefits—the indirect benefits which accrue from the provision of independent mobility and accessible transport. The report, carried out by Cranfield university and funded by the Rowntree Trust, draws attention to the costs which accrue, for example, to the health service and to social services when they have to provide services to overcome a lack of mobility.

One example is the cost of a doctor leaving his or her surgery to attend a patient at home because that patient has no means of independent transport. That is costly. The economics of the issue is not straightforward or easy to tackle, but I am pleased to say that the Department of Transport will be setting up a joint working group with other relevant Departments to explore some of the issues and the implications that it has for long-term funding.

Helping people become more mobile spans the policy interests of a number of Government Departments and carries benefit not only for disabled people themselves, but for society as a whole. Mobility is essential if disabled people are to realise their potential and contribute to the social and economic fabric of the communities in which they live and work.

The right hon. Gentleman is impatient for change, and he is right to be. No change comes from passive waiting. I can tell him that I am an impatient Minister. I, too, want change for the better for people with disabilities, and I want it to have happened yesterday. I know, as he knows, that we can only achieve so much at a time and that we can only afford so much at a time. Many priorities for action and spending compete with each other. Nevertheless, step by step, we are making progress. We must not raise hopes that cannot be fulfilled, but we can and we do set our sights on the horizon as we strive together to enable people with disabilities to live life to the fullest possible extent and to be full members of our society.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 June 1994

TREASURY

Taxpayers Charter

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Dewsbury tax office has achieved the targets set by the taxpayers charter.

Mr. Dorrell: Dewsbury tax office operates efficiently, and is committed to achieving the targets set by the taxpayers charter.

Hospital Developments

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the role of Treasury Ministers in the approval for new hospital developments.

Mr. Portillo: The role of the Treasury is to advise its Ministers on the level of resources appropriate for individual departmental programmes and to satisfy itself that public funds—including funds for capital developments—are used efficiently and effectively.

In this context, Treasury Ministers reserve the right to examine any proposed capital development to ensure that it is affordable and represents value for money. I also formally approve new hospital developments, or schemes which are part of a planned programme of development, which have a total capital cost over £50 million.

Tax Office, Dewsbury

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the reason for closing the tax office in Dewsbury.

Mr. Dorrell: Revenue management is considering a proposal to move the work of Dewsbury tax office to a new office in Leeds. No decision is likely to be made on this proposal for some months. The proposal arises from the Revenue's change programme which is designed to improve the quality and efficiency of the service provided to taxpayers by the Department. The Dewsbury proposal will be assessed against those objectives.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost of keeping the Dewsbury tax office open.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimated cost for 1994-95 of keeping the Dewsbury tax office open is £1,991,000.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have visited or telephoned the Dewsbury tax office, for information or advice, in each of the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of people who have visited or telephoned the Dewsbury tax office, for information or advice, in each of the last three years is as follows:

	Year to April 1992	1993	1994
Telephone calls	49,717	51,638	55,961
Personal callers	10,597	9,748	9,577
TOTAL	60,314	61,386	65,538

Mortgage Tax Relief, Scotland

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value of providing mortgage tax relief in Scotland; and how many households received it in the latest year for which he has information.

Mr. Dorrell: It is estimated that the cost of mortgage interest relief for Scotland in 1993-94 was £280 million. It was received by about 710,000 married couples and single people. The estimates are based on the regional distribution of mortgages shown by the 1992 Family Expenditure Survey applied to the United Kingdom total estimates for 1993-94.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the current legislation for reinvestment rollover relief which allows individuals and most trustees to defer capital gains tax on any chargeable gains which they reinvest in an unquoted trading company.

Mr. Dorrell: A loophole has been identified in the capital gains tax reinvestment rollover relief rules. This enables taxpayers in certain circumstances to convert what is meant to be a tax deferral into an outright exemption. The main circumstances are where someone reinvests in shares bought from a spouse or where someone realises gains on two or more disposals and reinvests in shares whose market value is less than the total gains realised.

The Government intend to correct this defect in the next Finance Bill. The new rules will apply to disposals, acquisitions and other chargeable events occurring on or after today. Further details are given in a press release which the Inland Revenue is issuing.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will cause a case-stated to be delivered to Mr. Marriott of Barnstormers, West Lane, Higher Blagdon, Paignton, as requested, following the hearing at the beginning of February before the Commissioners with regard to capital gains tax liability arising from a defunct business; if he will make a statement as to the reasons for the delays in delivering a case-stated; and if he will cause bankruptcy proceedings to be halted until the case-stated has been delivered so as to provide the information needed for an appeal.

Mr. Dorrell: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 15 June.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what allowance for price rises will be made to the electricity supply industry to recover costs incurred through the reduction in electricity voltage.

Mr. Eggar: Matters relating to pricing in respect of the electricity supply industry are for the Director General of Electricity Supply. Any costs are not likely to be incurred for several years and would also depend on the final stages of harmonisation which will not take place until some time after the year 2003.

Airbus

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the desirability of publishing the overall profit or loss of the airbus project and the amount of public or state industry financial commitment so far contributed.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. It is for the Airbus Industrie and its partners to decide what financial information it will publish.

The United Kingdom Government have contributed £746·4 million towards British Aerospace's involvement in the consortium and has recouped £178·3 million to date.

Coal Industry

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the British Coal pension schemes will be guaranteed by Government; when the new industry-wide schemes for the privatised industry will be set up; what protected person status will mean; and what scheme contribution rates will be payable in future.

Mr. Eggar: It is currently envisaged that, subject to the Coal Industry Bill having secured parliamentary approval and Royal Assent, Government guarantees for the mineworkers' pension scheme—MPS—and the British Coal staff superannuation scheme—SSS—would come into effect in mid-September this year. At that time the schemes would be modified as necessary by regulations as proposed in the Bill. It is envisaged that the two new industry-wide schemes proposed for the industry after privatisation would then be established in December.

On the day when the industry-wide schemes are established employers of contributing members of the MPS and SSS who cease to be or are not British Coal employees—that is, any employees of British Coal or its subsidiaries transferred on that day to successor companies and all other persons who are scheme members on that day but are no longer or were never employed by the corporation or its subsidiaries—will be obliged to give such employees the option to join the industry-wide schemes in which the employees will gain statutory protected-person status. Successor employers of members of the MPS or SSS who remain as British Coal employees for some period after the establishment of the industry-wide schemes and who are subsequently transferred to the successor employers will be obliged at the time of the transfer to give such employees the option to join the industry-wide schemes in which the employees will gain protected-person status. Protected person status will operate to safeguard the pension benefit structures of the MPS and SSS which will be reproduced within the industry-wide schemes.

Contribution rates for employees and indicative estimates of initial employer contribution rates are set out for each industry-wide scheme as percentages of pensionable earnings:

	Employees' contributions Per cent.	*Employers' contributions Per cent.*
IWS–MPS	5·25	9·25
IWS–SSS	5·00	15·00

There will be no transfer of employer contribution holidays from the MPS or SSS to the industry-wide schemes.

Konver Programme

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount of money made available for training and reskilling under the Konver programme in Essex; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: A total of £201,000 was made available in Essex for training projects as part of £501,000 of grants to projects in the county from the United Kingdom's 1993 Konver programme. I shall seek to ensure that the United Kingdom receives its fair share from the £380 million available under Konver II for the period 1994-1997.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total value by region of *(a)* regional selective assistance and *(b)* regional enterprise grants for the period 1 August 1993 to 19 May 1994.

Mr. Sainsbury: The value of offers that have been made by region in England of (i) regional selective assistance and (ii) regional enterprise grants for the period 1 August 1993 to 19 May 1994 are as follows:

	Regional selective assistance £ million	*Regional enterprise grants £ million*
East	0·4	0·3
East Midlands	4·9	1·7
London	0·5	—
Merseyside	13·3	1·5
North East	26·6	1·5
North West	11·6	—
South East	1·6	0·6
South West	12·3	1·0
West Midlands	13·9	0·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	11·6	4·4
TOTAL	96·7	11·8

NATIONAL HERITAGE

British Broadcasting Corporation

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will discuss with the chairman of governors of the BBC their proposal for ethnic quotas in trainee schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: No. The BBC is responsible for decisions about recruitment to its training schemes and other employment matters. The Race Relations Act 1976 permits discrimination on the basis of racial group in the selection of trainees when statutory criteria are satisfied.

HOME DEPARTMENT

United Kingdom Passport Agency

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to contract out or privatise any function of the United Kingdom Passport Agency;

(2) what was the result of stage II, dealing with the scope for privatisation and abolition, of the framework document review of the United Kingdom Passport Agency;

(3) what plans there are to market test the United Kingdom Passport Agency during the next two years;

(4) what was the result of stage I, dealing with the evaluation of performance, of the framework document review of the United Kingdom Passport Agency.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In accordance with the normal practice of reviewing executive agencies after they have been in existence for three years the activities of the United Kingdom Passport Agency are currently under review. The review includes an evaluation of the agency's performance and an examination of the options for delivering its services. An announcement on the future of the agency, and on any plans for changing the arrangements for delivering its services, will be made in due course.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which private companies have been invited to tender for the post and data entry function at the United Kingdom Passport Agency.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. No tender has been issued.

Firearms

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research into the origins of firearms and shotguns used in the pursuit of crime his Department has commissioned or undertaken;

(2) what research his Department has commissioned or undertaken to identify how many legally held and licensed shotguns have been used in the pursuit of crime.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Research which was commissioned by the Home Office into the use of firearms in offences of robbery has been conducted by the Oxford centre for criminological research. One of the aims of the research was to establish how the guns used in robbery were obtained. The report of the research has recently been completed.

In addition, a study has been conducted by the Home Office research and planning unit into the theft of firearms from an analysis of police crime reports.

It is expected that both reports will be published shortly.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to permit firearms certificates to be issued to members of the public on condition that such arms will be used only on private land specified on the certificate and where land is located away from public highways and public rights of way.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. Chief officers of police already have extensive powers to refuse the issue of firearms certificates to anyone without a good reason to possess one, or to anyone who could not possess one without danger to public safety or the peace. In addition, chief officers may impose territorial conditions on firearm certificates, restricting the area where the firearm may be used.

999 Calls

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines he issues to *(a)* chief police officers and *(b)* chief fire officers on the timing and release of information to the press following a 999 call to a serious road accident.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No specific guidelines are issued to chief officers of police or to chief officers on the timing and release of information to the press following a 999 call to a serious road accident. This is matter for chief officers to decide. General guidance to all emergency services about dealing with the media is contained in the Home Office publication "Dealing with Disaster".

Remand Prisoners

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many citizens of each country of the European Union have been remanded in custody in the United Kingdom for more than *(a)* two years and *(b)* one year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Sir Russell Johnston, dated 20 June 1994.

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many citizens of each country of the European Union have been remanded in custody in the United Kingdom for more than *(a)* two years and *(b)* one year.

The latest available provisional information is for the population in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 April 1994. It is given in the attached table.

Population of remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 April 1994, remanded in custody for more than (a) two years and (b) one year, by European Union country[2]

Nationality	*Time since first remand in custody*[1]	
	Over two years	*Over one year but less than two years*
Belgium	—	—
Denmark	—	—
Netherlands	—	5
France	—	1
Germany	—	1
Greece	—	—
Ireland	1	7
Italy	—	1
Luxembourg	—	—
Portugal	—	—
Spain	—	1
United Kingdom	37	287
All EU Nationalities	38	303

[1] Time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment; includes any intervening time on bail. Excludes any time spent in non-Prison Service establishments (eg police cells) before reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment.

[2] Provisional figures.

Animal Experimentation

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet the European Commission's target of a 50 per cent. reduction in animals used in experiments by the year 2000.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government fund research into alternatives to the use of animals in scientific work, and welcome the contribution which the European centre for validation of alternative methods—ECVAM—will make at a European level to the identification and validation of alternatives. The number of procedures carried out in the United Kingdom has been declining, and this process, combined with the search for alternatives, should make a significant contribution to meeting the European Commission target.

Public Consultation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances it is his Department's practice, when issuing a public consultation document, to inform those consulted that their responses will be made public unless they explicity ask for them to be kept confidential; and if he will arrange for his Department to do so in all cases in future.

Mr. Howard: The code of practice on Government information commits the Department to publishing relevant facts and analysis underlying major policy proposals. This would include details of any public consultation exercise. Comments on public consultation documents are sought on the basis that the Department would not wish to publish individual responses without the agreement of those providing them.

Civil Servants (Outside Appointments)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many job offers were reported by staff in his Department under the requirements of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments in each of the last 10 years by *(a)* staff of grade 3 and above, *(b)* staff below grade 3, *(c)* staff in sections concerned with procurement or contract work, under section 15 of the rules of 1 February 1993 and *(d)* staff in other sections, under section 14; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Howard: The rules do not require staff below grade 3 level to report approaches to the centre of their departments. Five offers of jobs have been reported by staff at grade 3 level and above since 1989, all of which have been followed by a formal application. The rest of the information requested is either not available or is not maintained centrally.

Blakenhurst and Doncaster Prisons

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make available in the Library details of contracts for the Blakenhurst and Doncaster prisons; what representations he has received concerning these contracts; and what has been the nature of such representations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Robert Wareing, dated 20 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about Blakenhurst and Doncaster prisons.

A copy of the invitations to tender which formed the basis of the contracts are already in the Library and copies of the contracts without details of the contractor's prices will be placed there.

From time to time the Director General receives questions concerning the nature of these contracts. They are diverse in their scope but have covered the costs of the contracts; staffing numbers and arrangements; which companies had tendered for the contracts; and the wrongly perceived 'privatisation' of the Prison Service.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement with regard to absconding by illegal immigrants from Jamaica who arrived at Gatwick in December 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Efforts are being made to trace, with a view to removal, 11 passengers who arrived on two charter flights at Gatwick last December and who are known to be here illegally because they have not complied with the terms of their temporary admission. If any other passengers who were allowed to enter for six months are found to have overstayed their visit, we will pursue them with a view to deportation in the normal way.

Tamara Norashkaryan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the application for political asylum made by Tamara Norashkaryan, a Russian visitor to the United Kingdom, was considered under the normal procedures; who reviewed the recommendation on the application within the Immigration and Nationality Department at senior official level; and what conditions have been imposed on Ms Norashkaryan's leave to remain in the United Kingdom;

(2) when Tamara Norashkaryan, a visitor to the United Kingdom from Russia, applied for political asylum in the United Kingdom; when her application was approved; whether a recommendation on her application was referred to Ministers for decision; when he was informed Ms Norashkaryan had married Sir Antony Buck; and if he will make a statement;

(3) on what date Sir Antony Buck was interviewed concerning Tamara Norashkaryan's application for political asylum in the United Kingdom; what representations Sir Antony has made to Ministers concerning the immigration status of Ms Norashkaryan; and in what form and on what date or dates such representations were made;

(4) how many meetings his officials have had with Ms Tamara Norashkaryan, a Russian visitor to the United Kingdom, in connection with her application for political asylum in the United Kingdom; when she completed the necessary application forms; when she told his officials she intended to marry or had married Sir Antony Buck; and for how long in total Ms Norashkaryan was interviewed.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It has been the long-standing normal policy not to confirm or deny whether any individual has applied for political asylum or to provide details of the consideration of individual claims.

Police Pay

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decisions he has reached on the recommendations made by the Police Negotiating Board for the United Kingdom for changes to pay structures, pay levels and pay-related conditions of service for police officers in the ranks of inspector and above.

Mr. Howard: The Police Negotiating Board's recommendations for police officers of all ranks were sent to the Secretaries of State for the Home Departments at the beginning of April. The board subsequently put forward further proposals which took account of the decision which I announced on 26 April that the rank of chief inspector should be retained.

We have now studied these proposals carefully. We accept the board's proposals for superintendents and their revised proposals for inspectors and chief inspectors. The proposals will be implemented with effect from 1 September 1994.

New pay arrangements for chief constables and assistant chief constables are linked to the introduction from 1 April 1995 of fixed-term appointments for officers in these ranks. Once certain outstanding issues relating to these appointments have been settled I shall be in a position to announce the Government's decision on pay for this group of officers.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if discretionary life prisoners who have been transferred to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983, and whom it is not appropriate to remit to prison even though they no longer require, or can effectively be given, hospital treatment, are able to have the question of their release considered by the Parole Board under section 34 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Howard: The cases of discretionary life prisoners in this category are referred to the Parole Board under section 34 of the 1991 Act, while they remain in hospital, in the same way as if they had been remitted to prison.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuba Mountains

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from discussions recently held by the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development about the killings and dispossession of the people of the Nuba mountains.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are not aware that the subject of the Nuba mountains has been discussed at the IGADD talks. A draft declaration of principles, now under consideration by the parties, makes general references to human rights and human suffering in war-affected areas.

Korea

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Korea in regard to military and nuclear developments.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: North Korea's continued non-compliance with its safeguards agreement remains a cause for great concern. In the United Nations Security Council we are consulting other member states and regional countries on the timing, tactics and substance of Security Council action. Another cause of concern is the large concentration of North Korean forces along its border with the Republic of Korea. We urge North Korea to recognise that peaceful means offer the best chance of resolving the current problems on the Korean peninsula.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the use of the Turks and Caicos islands as a processing camp for Haitian refugees will be limited to a certain period of time.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The agreement among the three Governments on the processing centre to be established in the Turks and Caicos islands is limited in duration to a period not exceeding six months.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to make the proposed United States of America processing camp for Haitian refugees on the Turks and Caicos islands subject to a formal leasehold agreement betwen the United Kingdom and the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The arrangement to establish a processing centre for Haitian boat people in the Turks and Caicos islands is contained in a memorandum of understanding signed by the British, United States and Turks and Caicos islands Governments. The UNHCR will be closely involved in the arrangement. Under the MOU, the TCI Government will make a site available in Grand Turk for the processing centre, which the United States authorities will occupy on a lease arrangement.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans exist to resettle those Haitians who are judged to be genuine political refugees; and whether they will have a right of abode in the Turks and Caicos islands.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Under the arrangement agreed with the United States for the establishment of a processing centre for Haitian boat people in the Turks and Caicos islands, those Haitians considered by United States immigration officers running the processing centre to have a genuine claim to refugee status will be removed from the Turks and Caicos islands and resettled in third countries or in the United States. These Haitians will not have the right of abode in the Turks and Caicos islands.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consult the authorities in Lebanon to secure more information on the

reported confession of Yusef Shaban that he had responsibility for the Lockerbie disaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in contact with the Lebanese authorities on this matter.

Visitor Visas

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many initial assessments prior to formal application for a visitor visa have in the last year resulted in the potential applicant being advised not to proceed with formal application on the grounds that they are unlikely to succeed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: At the 27 posts worldwide where a formal preliminary examination of applicants is carried out, 33,890 applicants were advised in 1993 that their applications would be unlikely to succeed without further information being supplied. Such advice would no doubt also have been offered at other posts when appropriate, but precise figures are not available.

Ukraine

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his letter of 27 May to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what were the results of discussions with the Government of the Ukraine about maintaining and seeking to improve electricity supplies, and technical assistance and loan finance for safety upgrading and investment in completing of Ukraine nuclear power stations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: So far, the talks have been at an exploratory level. Substantive discussions are not expected to take place before next month, when the Ukrainian presidential election process is completed, and the G7 summit in Naples has had the opportunity to consider the question of nuclear safety in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine.

Tamara Norashkaryan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at which British overseas post Tamara Norashkaryan, a language lecturer at Moscow university, applied to visit the United Kingdom; when her application was made; for how long a visit she applied and what were her reasons for visiting the United Kingdom; when the visa was granted; who sponsored her visit; whether Ms Norashkaryan had previously applied to enter the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will look into this matter and write to the hon. Member in due course.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work has been contracted out by the Natural Resources Institute as a direct result of the redundancies announced in January 1994 in *(a)* oilseeds, *(b)* mycotoxins and *(c)* other areas.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Natural Resources Institute under its chief executive, Mr. Anthony Beattie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Anthony Beattie to Mr. Tom Clarke, dated 20 June 1994:

1. Mr. Lennox-Boyd has aked me to reply to your question about the amount of work contracted out by NRI as a direct result of the staff reductions announced in January.

2. We have so far contracted out work to the value of £6,300 in the oilseeds area. No work has been contracted out so far in mycotoxins or in other areas. It may, of course, prove necessary to do so in due course but I have no reason at this stage to think that this will be a substantial requirement.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps he will take to protect and guarantee the integrity of aid expenditure decisions relating to work undertaken by the Natural Resources Institute following a change in ownership of the institute;

(2) if he will rule out a change of ownership for the Natural Resources Institute.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 26 January, at column 272. Options for the future ownership of the Natural Resources Institute are still being considered. Whatever the future ownership of NRI, contracts placed with it by the ODA will continue to be subject to all normal ODA procedures which are designed to ensure effective development and value for money.

Brazil

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in Brazil respecting the provision of aid for health and environmental purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: During his visit to Brazil in April, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Brazilian counterpart discussed issues relating to sustainable development agreeing, particularly, the importance of effectively following up the environmental objectives agreed at the Rio Earth summit. The Minister for Overseas Development also met the Brazilian Minister for the Environment and Amazonia earlier this month, when environmental issues in Amazonia and the urban areas were discussed.

It is our intention to maintain an effective bilateral programme of technical co-operation with Brazil in areas of mutual priority, including the environment, both natural and urban, and health sector management reform. We also support health and environment projects managed by United Kingdom non-governmental organisations.

UN Children's Fund

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give his reasons for the annual reduction in the United Kingdom's contribution to the core funding of the United Nations children's fund.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Growing pressures on the aid programme mean that we are unable to insulate UN

voluntary funds from some reduction in our annual core funding. However, this is only part of our support. We also contribute generously to UNICEF's emergency and other extra budgetary programmes.

Pergau Dam

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what economic rate of return was projected by the Overseas Development Administration for the Pergau dam project in Malaysia *(a)* at the time of the contract proposal in January 1989 when the price was £316 million, *(b)* at the time of the revised contract proposal in April 1989 when the price was £397 million and *(c)* at the time approval was given in 1991 when the price was £417 million.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The appropriate method of economic appraisal for projects like Pergau which are part of a financially viable interconnected grid system involves calculation of the least cost expansion path. This method utilises a computer model to analyse and minimise total systems costs as new generating units are added to meet the forecast levels of demand.

In January 1989 ODA did not have sufficient information to judge whether Pergau appeared on the least cost path although this seemed likely at the then price of £316 million; at subsequent higher cost estimates the project was judged to be outside the least cost expansion path.

ENVIRONMENT

Non-domestic Rating

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many hereditaments were included in the 1990 non-domestic rating list; and how many appeals against valuation were lodged.

Mr. Gummer: A total of 1·584 million hereditaments were included in English 1990 non-domestic rating lists in April 1990. By the end of March 1994, 1·1 million proposals to alter the list had been made to the Valuation Office Agency, of which 633,000 were against the values originally shown in the list and 467,000 were made following changes in circumstances since the 1990 list came into force.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many places were made available for those sleeping rough in central London in 1985, 1990, 1993, and what is his estimate for 1995; and what was the average take-up rate, expressed as a percentage.

Sir George Young: Accommodation for people sleeping rough in central London is provided by a variety of agencies, including the Resettlement Agency, housing associations, local authorities and the voluntary sector. My Department does not have detailed information on the total number of places available, nor average occupancy rates for any particular year, and I cannot estimate how many places might be available in a future year.

As part of the rough sleepers initiative 1990-91 to 1995-96 in central London, the Government are funding emergency and temporary bedspaces in winter shelters, nightshelters and hostels; temporary accommodation in properties leased from private sector landlords; and permanent accommodation in flats and houses for people to move on to. This provision, which includes at least 3,300 places in permanent move-on accommodation, has enabled many thousands of people to start a new life away from the streets, and will continue to do so.

Housing, Harrogate

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present number of housing units provided by housing associations in the Harrogate borough council area.

Sir George Young: The information requested can be found in appendix 1, page 58 of "Housing Associations in 1993" published by the Housing Corporation and held in the Library.

Somerset County Council

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he has received in support of retaining the county council in a two-tier structure for the present county of Somerset.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has received 1,754 written representations opposing the Local Government Commission's recommendation to replace Somerset county council and the five Somerset district councils with three unitary authorities. A large number of these did not state a preferred alternative. It is therefore not possible to give an accurate figure for those supporting a two-tier structure.

Miss Patricia Eaton

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total cost, including the cost of *(a)* staff time, *(b)* legal advice and representation and *(c)* litigation relating to this case to (i) the Inner London education authority, (ii) the London residuary body and (iii) the London Pension Fund Authority, of responding to the complaints lodged by Miss Patricia Eaton of Kidbrooke Park road, London SE3, relating to her treatment by the ILEA when she was in its employment, over the period from 1980 to the present date.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the London Pensions Fund Authority and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should contact the chief executive for the information he requires.

Naval Firing Range, Cornwall

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has been consulted by the Ministry of Defence over the proposal to site a naval firing range off Dodman point in Cornwall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Yes, in January 1994. The Department raised no objections to the proposal.

European Regional Development Fund

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement clarifying the manner in which ERDF grants are taken into account in

assessing the standard spending assessments of local authorities; and what steps have been taken to harmonise the principles of such policies with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: When a local authority in England receives an ERDF grant for a capital project, a supplementary credit approval—SCA—is issued to it. Nether the grant, nor the related SCA, is taken into account in the calculation of its standard spending assessment.

The systems of support for local authority expenditure in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland differ in a number of respects. Decisions on the operation of each system are the responsibility of the relevant Secretary of State.

Park Homes

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households his Department estimates to live in park homes; and what plans his Department has to introduce a council tax band below band A to cover park homes.

Mr. Curry: British Holiday and Home Parks Association Limited has estimated that there are about 96,000 residential mobile homes at mobile home parks in Britain. We have no plans to introduce a council tax band below the present band A.

Traveller Sites

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list both the statutory obligations that apply at present and guidance given to local authorities for the provision of sites for gipsies and travellers; and if he will outline the changes that will take place at the time of enactment of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill.

Mr. Baldry: Part II of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 requires local authorities to provide adequate accommodation on caravan sites for gipsies defined as

"persons of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin",

residing in or resorting to their areas. In non-metropolitan counties in England and Wales the functions of site development and management are shared between county councils and district councils. County councils are required to consult district councils and other persons before adopting site proposals.

Guidance on these and other relevant provisions is given in the Department's circulars 28/77, 57/78, 8/81 and 1/94.

If enacted, clause 75 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill would repeal both part II of the 1968 Act and also the Secretary of State's power to pay grant in respect of the capital costs of site provision in England and Wales. Local authorities would continue to have discretionary powers, under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, to manage existing sites and to provide further sites.

Clauses 72 and 73 of the Bill would give all local authorities in England and Wales new powers to control unauthorised camping in their areas.

Urban Programme

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the conclusions reached as a result of the recent evaluation of the effectiveness of the Government's urban programme spending; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: The report "Assessing the Impact of Urban Policy" which is part of the inner cities research programme of the Department of the Environment, will be published shortly.

Abandoned Mineworkings

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has agreed measures with British Coal to overcome potential pollution disasters resulting from its termination of pumping operations at abandoned mineworkings.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Discharges from coal mines in England and Wales are subject to regulation by the National Rivers Authority. It is for British Coal, in consultation with the NRA, to determine what measures are necessary to avoid pollution.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. David Davis: If there is a need to deal with beggars or anyone sleeping rough in doorways, security staff in London buildings occupied by the Cabinet Office, its agencies, HMSO and COI would contact the Metropolitan police.

No problems have been experienced during the past three months.

PRIME MINISTER

Department of Transport

Ms Walley: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to abolish the Department of Transport or merge it with another Government Department.

The Prime Minister: None.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers have been given a specific responsibility for disabled people within their respective departmental portfolios.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People has a cross-Government remit for all issues affecting disabled people. The Cabinet Office produces a list of ministerial responsibilities which identifies the responsibilities of all Ministers, including

those with specific, designated responsibility for matters affecting disabled people within their departments. The list was updated in May and copies placed in both Libraries. Copies can also be obtained from the Vote Office on request.

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects ministerial consultation on legislation providing civil rights to the disabled will be complete; and if he will introduce a Government Bill before the summer recess.

The Prime Minister: In reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on 10 May 1994, *Official Report,* column 153, I stated that consultation would take place within six months. Preparations are now well advanced on proposals to help disabled people. Consultation will start as soon as possible and is expected to last for three months. No legislation will be introduced in advance of consultation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Hague: No specific central guidance is given to security guards on these matters. It would be an issue for the managers of the individual offices concerned. No records are kept on the extent to which problems may be encountered.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many applications there have been in the last six months in each of the English health authority regions for a disability living allowance;

(2) how much money has been granted in disability living allowance in the last six months, nationally and by health authority region; and how much was granted during the same period a year earlier;

(3) what proportion of those people applying for the disability living allowance between 1 January and 31 May in each health authority region and nationally had their application rejected; and what was the rejection rate for similar applicants between 1 January 1993 and 31 May 1993;

(4) what are the rejection rates, by condition giving rise to an application for a disability living allowance, for applications in the last 12 months, set out by health authority region.

Mr. Scott: Information about disability living allowance is not available in the form requested. Nationally, between 1 December 1993 and 31 May 1994 there were 216,000 applications. In the same period 97,000 awards were made on initial claims, and between 1 December 1992 and 31 May 1993 132,000 awards were made. The proportion of applications made between 1 January 1994 and 31 May 1994 that were rejected was 50 per cent. and for the same period in 1993 the proportion rejected was 46 per cent. Where a claim is rejected no information covering a claimant's disabling condition is recorded.

Source: DSS Analytical Services Division—based on 100 per cent. count.

Fire Safety, Quarry House

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether a fire certificate has been issued for Quarry House, Leeds, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: An application to the Home Office for the issue of a fire certificate was made in July 1992. Such certificates are not normally issued until all defects within a new building, however small, have been rectified. The Home Office has confirmed that there is an extremely good fire prevention system in Quarry house, and there are no doubts about its effectiveness. The Home Office has begun the final scheduled inspection of the building prior to the issue of a fire certificate.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the date of the inspection for fire safety at Quarry house, Leeds *(a)* before the opening of the building, *(b)* between the opening of the building and 9 June 1994 and *(c)* since 10 June 1994; and if he will list those carrying out the inspection.

Mr. Burt: The construction of Quarry house commenced in November 1990 and the building was completed and occupied in three separate phases, the first phase being ready on 6 July 1992. The following site inspections were carried out

(a) before the phased occupations:

25 April 1991
Property Services Agency (PSA) Fire Officer and PSA Building Control Section

May 1991 to July 1992
Site meetings and inspections involving PSA Fire Officer and PSA Building Control held at monthly intervals

30 March 1992
West Yorkshire Fire Brigade and PSA Fire Officer

June 1992
Weekly inspections by PSA Fire Officer, with further unannounced visits, to review fire precautions and evacuation procedures

8 June 1992
Witness testing of fire alarm system by Home Office Inspectorate, Health and Safety Executive, PSA Fire Officer and PSA Building Control Section

6 July 1992
PSA Fire Officer inspection immediately prior to, and following occupation of Phase 1 of building

August 1992
PSA Fire Officer witness testing of atria smoke extraction systems

1 September 1992
PSA Fire Officer inspection immediately prior to phase 2 occupation by staff

18 November 1992
Home Office inspectorate and Health and Safety Executive visited, and made further visit within 7 days

5 February 1993
PSA Fire Officer inspection immediately prior to and following Phase 3 occupation by staff

1 March 1993
PSA Fire Officer final inspection

(b) between full occupation and 9 June 1994
There were no formal fire inspections between February 1993 and June 1994.

(c) since 10 June 1994

13 June 1994
Home Office Inspectorate

Disability Working Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications there have been in the last six months in each of the English health authority regions for a disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: Information about disability working allowance is not available in the form requested. Nationally, between 1 December 1993 and 31 May 1994 there were 6,045 applications.

Social Fund

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for assistance from the social fund at the east Nottinghamshire, north Nottinghamshire and west Nottinghamshire benefits offices were made in the last year for which figures are available; how many were accepted and how many were refused.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 17 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of applications to the Social Fund in the Benefits Agency's East, North and West Nottinghamshire Districts.

You asked for details of how many of these applications were successful and how many were refused. Those details are shown at Appendix A. Please note that Cold Weather Payments, which are paid without claims being made, are not included in the figures provided.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A

1993-94	*Applications*	*Awards*	*Refusals*
Nottinghamshire East	22,875	12,436	9,583
Nottinghamshire North	20,139	10,380	8,425
Nottinghamshire West	26,246	15,170	10,301

The above application figures include the following:
Applications awaiting determination.
Applications withdrawn before determination.
Budgeting and crisis loan offers which are not accepted.

Tamara Norashkaryan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when Tamara Norashkaryan, a visitor to the United Kingdom applied to his Department for assistance; what assistance she was given; from what date such financial assistance was provided; if Ms Norashkaryan submitted a standard acknowledgement letter with her application or after submitting any application; what was the total amount of financial assistance given by his Department to Ms Norashkaryan; what advice was given to her to apply to any local authority or other public agency for assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Max Madden, dated 17 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking specific details about Ms Tamara Norashkaryan and her application to the Department for financial assistance.

As you are already aware Ms Norashkaryan is currently visiting the United Kingdom. I can confirm that she has made a claim for financial assistance by way of income support and that a decision has been made on her claim. However due to the confidential nature of this case I have written to you separately and in greater detail about this matter.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

HEALTH

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people over the next 10 years are expected to develop *(a)* HIV, *(b)* AIDS and *(c)* AIDS dementia.

Mr. Sackville: Projections of the incidence and prevalence of AIDS cases and other severe HIV disease in England and Wales have been made by a working group chaired by Professor N. E. Day. "Communicable Disease Report" 1993; 3 (Supplement 1): S1-17, copies of which are available in the Library.

Treatment Abroad

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is held by her Department on the number of NHS patients who have been sent abroad for surgical treatment from *(a)* GP fundholding practices and *(b)* GP non-fundholding practices.

Dr. Mawhinney: General practitioners cannot authorise such treatment.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what risk assessment she has commissioned on the link between benzene exhaust emissions from motor vehicles and human health.

Mr. Sackville: The Committees on Carcinogenicity—COC—and on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants—COMEAP—have considered hazards to health from inhalation of benzene, which is a component of exhaust emissions from motor vehicles and of vapour fumes from petrol.

Benzine is toxic at high doses and is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a human carcinogen. Long-term occupational exposure to benzene at concentrations a thousand times greater than those typically found in urban air in the United Kingdom has been shown to increase the risk of certain types of leukaemia in adults; its use in industry is therefore strictly controlled. Although it is not possible to define an absolute safe level of exposure to benzene, levels in outdoor air encountered in the United Kingdom are considered by the COC and the COMEAP to present very low risk to health.

Psychological Testing

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS Executive, the Department of Health, NHS Trusts, NHS regions, district health authorities and

family health services authorities expend each year in employing *(a)* outside employment agencies and *(b)* employment agencies which conduct psychological testing.

Mr. Sackville: During 1993-94 the Department of Health, including its agencies and the National Health Service Executive spent the following amounts on recruitment exercises conducted by outside recruitment agencies, including Recruitment and Assessment Services, an executive agency of the Cabinet Office.

	Recruitment without psychological test £	*Recruitment with psychological test* £
DH (excluding agencies and the NHS Executive)	173,708	16,244
NHS Executive	54,902	14,805
Agencies		
NHS Pensions Agency	20,566	—
NHS Estates	—	36,191
Medicines Control Agency	43,041	—
TOTAL	292,217	67,240

Figures for NHS trusts, NHS regions, district health authorities and family health services authorities are not available centrally. NHS employers are autonomous and make their own arrangements.

Distinction Awards

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been paid by her Department as merit awards to medical consultants in each of the last 10 years.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a list of the names of the medical consultants who currently hold merit awards; and if she will indicate the grade that each has been awarded.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information about the awards status of individual consultants is confidential.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants in oral health have been awarded merit awards in the last 10 years.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of 296 distinction awards were granted to dental consultants in England in the years 1984 to 1993 inclusive.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a copy of the first annual report of the advisory committee on the distribution of awards.

Dr. Mawhinney: This was done following publication in April 1994.

Access to Treatment

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards the application of the principle of equitable access to NHS services on the basis of need and its implementation in relation to the provision of hospital services to patients of fundholding and non-fundholding general practices.

Dr. Mawhinney: Hospitals may not offer contracts to one purchaser which could disadvantage the patients of another. However, local waiting times for non-urgent treatment may vary according to clinical need and the priorities of different purchasers.

Emergency patients are always treated immediately, and urgent cases treated within locally agreed time scales.

Information Budgets

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the budgets and projected budgets for her Department's information department from 1986 to 1996.

Mr. Sackville: Expenditure and budget figures for the Department's Information Division which now includes the recently established public inquiry office and the rationalisation of the Department's printing services are shown in the table.

Year	*Publicity* £ *million*	*Manpower and running costs* £ *million*
1986-87	12·627	—
1987-88	12·381	—
1988-89	10·799	—
1989-90	17·248	0·890
1990-91	21·008	1·250
1991-92	24·471	1·491
1992-93	20·710	1·749
1993-94	[1]19·405	1·897
1994-95 (budgets)	23·067	2·247

[1] Estimated.

Information on manpower and running costs for the years 1986-87 to 1988-89 are not available in the form requested.

Budgets for 1995-96 have yet to be decided.

Serious Incidents

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all circulars issued by her Department since 1985 on the investigation of serious untoward incidents affecting patients; and if she will place a copy of each of those circulars in the Library.

Mr. Sackville: Hospitals were reminded of their responsibility to report adverse incidents involving medical devices in health circular HC(88)51 published in June 1988. This was updated by HSG(93)13 published in June 1993. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library.

Merit Awards Committees

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a list of the members of the regional merit awards committee for each region in England.

Dr. Mawhinney: A list of the members of the Regional C Awards Committee and Higher Awards Committee for each region in England will be placed in the Library.

Sports Injuries

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions apply to the charging by NHS hospitals for treatment for sports injuries.

Mr. Sackville: None. National health service treatment is free of charge unless there is a specific statutory power to charge.

European Union Health Expenditure

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest available per capita spending figures on the health services for each member state of the European Union.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service will be spending an estimated £674 for every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom in 1994-95. Figures for other member states of the European Union are not available on a comparable basis.

Discrimination

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the publications of her Department on discrimination in the NHS since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested from 1983 onwards is available in the Library. A comprehensive list of publications before 1983 is not available centrally.

Central Heating

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the Department of Health has commissioned on the links between lack of central heating and long-term limiting illness and disability.

Mr. Bowis: We are not aware of the existence of any such research.

Student Grants

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the regulations governing the provision of help with national health service charges so that students are assessed solely on the basis of the student grant they actually receive and not on the assumption that they take up a student loan.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Medical Negligence Cases

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list, by each district health authority in England and Wales, the average value of negligence cases brought by patients successfully concluded in each year since 1985;

(2) if she will list, by each district health authority in England and Wales, the total number of successful negligence cases brought by patients against the district health authorities for each year since 1985, indicating the number resolved incorporating secrecy clauses.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 14 March at columns *537-38* and on 10 May at columns *84-85*. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the Government's response to the Bloomfield report on dentistry before the end of June.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government's response to Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report will be published in due course.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those national health service trusts that did not reach their target of 6 per cent. return on capital for *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93 and *(c)* 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 20 April at column *541*.

Adrenalin Supplies

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to ensure that adequate supplies of adrenalin injections suitable for the immediate treatment of anaphylactic reaction are generally available; and what discussions her Department has had with the Medicines Control Agency on this subject.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Medicines Control Agency under its chief executive, Dr. K. H. Jones. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dr. K. H. Jones to Sir Cranley Onslow, dated 17 June 1994:

Adrenaline Injections for the treatment of Anaphylactic Reactions

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning supplies of Adrenaline injections suitable for the immediate treatment of anaphylactic reactions and their availability.

The Medicines Control Agency is an Executive Agency of the Department of Health responsible for safeguarding public health by licensing medicines, monitoring adverse drug reactions, surveillance of marketed drugs and publication of standards. The Agency carries out the day to day activities of the Licensing Authority which comprises Ministers. The Chief Executive reports to the Secretary of State for Health, and the Agency remains in frequent and regular contact with the Department.

Adrenaline Injection in a preloaded syringe (Min-I-Jet) was granted a product licence for the treatment of anaphylactic reactions after assessment for safety, quality and efficacy. The manufacturer however recently experienced production difficulties resulting in shortages of supply during April and May 1994. Further and adequate supplies of the Min-I-Jet became available during the week commencing 6 June 1994.

It is a principle of UK Medicines Control that doctors have clinical freedom to prescribe unlicensed medicinal products and Section 13(1) of the Medicines Act grants an exemption allowing very limited quantities of imports of such products. This is allowed without reference to MCA and it is on this basis that an unlicensed Adrenaline Injection in a self-injecting syringe (Epipen) has been imported from the United States of America by or to the order of doctors in the UK for the treatment of their particular patients. This product has not been assessed by this Agency and prescribers assume full responsibility for its use.

The shortage of licensed Min-I-Jets resulted in an increased demand for unlicensed Epipen and the Boots Company applied to the MCA for an exemption to import a significant quantity in anticipation of orders from doctors in accordance with Statutory Instrument SI (1984) 673. Normally exemption under this Regulation is refused if there is an equivalent licensed product on the market. In accordance with this practice, exemption was initially refused because of the restored availability of Min-I-Jets. However, it became apparent that although adequate supplies of Min-I-Jets had been resumed, those supplies might not have reached community pharmacists in all areas. The decision to refuse Epipen exemption status was therefore reviewed and subsequently reversed.

The demand for Adrenaline Injection is currently being met by the licensed Min-I-Jets supplemented by the unlicensed Epipen. This Agency understands that an application for a UK product licence may be submitted for Epipen. In such circumstances the application would be assessed by the MCA and if granted the licence would enable Epipen to be marketed in the UK.

Social Work Records

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes she intends to make to existing legislation or practice on access to social work records following the proposals issued for consultation by her Department on 26 February 1992 entitled, "Response to the Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Graham Gaskin (Access to Records)".

Mr. Bowis: The 1993 White Paper on open government sets out the Government's proposals for a new statutory right of access to personal records, adding to existing rights of access.

Accident and Emergency Services, Barking and Havering

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has as to why the London borough of Redbridge was not formally sent a copy of the Barking and Havering health authority consultation document on changes to accident and emergency services.

Mr. Sackville: None. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Littlewood, chairman of Barking and Havering health authority, for this information.

Infertility

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provision is made for *(a)* infertility treatment and *(b)* infertility investigation in each of the Birmingham health districts;

(2) what advice each of the Birmingham health districts has sought in the last three years from her Department as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing infertility investigation and treatment;

(3) what has been the *(a)* revenue spend and *(b)* capital spend in each of the Birmingham health districts in each of the last three years for which figures are available on infertility treatment;

(4) what has been the *(a)* revenue spend and *(b)* capital spend in each of the Birmingham health districts by name in each of the last three years for which figures are available on infertility investigation.

Mr. Sackville: For information about infertility investigation and treatment in Birmingham the hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. B. Stoten, chairman of South Birmingham health authority and Dr. D. M. Skillicorn, chairman of North Birmingham health authority for further information.

The national health service provides a wide range of treatments for subfertility. Individual health authorities determine priorities in the light of local needs and circumstances. Advice is available to health authorities and clinicians in two publications drawn to the attention of the national health service in 1992:

(a) The Effective Health Care Bulletin on management of subfertility, published for the national health service Management Executive by a consortium of Leeds and York Universities and the research unit of the Royal College of Physicians.

(b) The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists publication "Infertility Guidelines for Practice".

Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the provision for infertility treatment in South Manchester district health authority;

(2) whether South Manchester district health authority has sought from her Department advice as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area;

(3) what provision is made for infertility investigation in South Manchester district health authority.

Mr. Sackville: For the information requested about infertility investigation and treatment in Manchester the hon. Member may wish to contact Professor Robert Boyd, chairman of Manchester health authority. We are not aware of requests for advice on this matter from the former South Manchester health authority.

The national health service provides a wide range of treatments for subfertility. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 18 May at column *520*.

General Practitioners

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average budget for *(a)* GP fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 for England and by region.

Dr. Mawhinney: Average budgets for general practitioner fundholders by region in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 are shown in the table. It is not possible to produce comparable information for non-fundholding general practitioners.

Average budgets for general practitioner fundholders by region: 1991-92 to 1993-94

£ million

Region	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Northern	1·7	1·7	1·8
Yorkshire	1·5	1·7	1·8
Trent	1·3	1·4	1·5
East Anglian	1·5	1·7	1·7
North West Thames	1·3	1·4	1·6
North East Thames	1·4	1·2	1·4
South East Thames	1·3	1·4	1·6
South West Thames	1·3	1·3	1·6
Wessex	1·3	1·5	1·8
Oxford	1·2	1·4	1·6
South Western	1·2	1·4	1·6
West Midlands	1·3	1·4	1·6
Mersey	1·3	1·3	1·6
North Western	1·3	1·4	1·5
England	1·4	1·5	1·6

Note:

From 1993-94, the scope of the general practitioner fundholder scheme was expanded to include the purchase of community health services. In addition, the minimum list size criterion for joining the scheme was reduced from 9,000 to 7,000 patients.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to investigate the extent to which general practitioner fundholders' savings have been used to fund the element of general practitioner staff costs normally paid by the general practitioner.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. The National Health Service (Fund-holding Practices) Regulations 1993 specifically preclude this.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have applied for recognised general

practitioner training courses in each year from 1989-90 to 1993-94; and what were the figures for individual courses for 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been de-registered by general practitioners in each English health region in each year since 1989.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Yorkshire RHA

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the total expenditure for each financial year since 1989-90 on the headquarters of the Yorkshire regional health authority at Harrogate.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Greetham, CBE, chairman of the authority, for details.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the location of the new headquarters for the Yorkshire and North region of the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: The Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority is preparing a business case, to determine the best location of the new regional headquarters.

Carers

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health the number of cases of bad practice recorded of *(a)* un-registered carers and *(b)* registered carers in 1993-94.

Mr. Bowis: Informal carers are usually spouses, relatives or close friends of people with a range of mental or physical needs. They are not registered as such. Poor quality care provided by employed carers is a matter for the employer concerned.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to set up an independent registration and regulatory body for unqualified paid carers within the health and social services departments;

(2) what is her policy on the British Association of Social Workers proposals for an independent statutory register of social workers.

Mr. Bowis: There have been various proposals for a General Social Services Council to regulate those employed in social work. These proposals are being considered by the Government.

Asthma

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the adequacy of patient information material on asthma available to general practitioners; and if her Department will distribute information provided by voluntary organisations.

Mr. Sackville: We are satisfied that general practitioners have adequate patient information on asthma available.

Prescriptons

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the numbers of private consultations which *(a)* result in a private prescription paid for by the patient and *(b)* are transcribed on to NHS prescriptions by the GPs.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available.

Burns Unit, Billericay

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to make the decision about moving the burns unit from Billericay to Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The regional health authority is expected to refer this matter to Ministers shortly.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much *(a)* a basic filling, *(b)* a crown and *(c)* a course of bridgework costs (i) an exempt NHS patient and (ii) a patient paying 80 per cent. of the cost of treatment;

(2) how much a basic filling, a crown and a course of bridgework would cost *(a)* an exempt national health service patient and *(b)* a patient paying 80 per cent. of the cost of treatment, if the dental charges were to rise by (i) 5 per cent., (ii) 10 per cent., (iii) 15 per cent., (iv) 20 per cent. and (v) 25 per cent.

Dr. Mawhinney: The statement of dental remuneration gives a range of fees payable to dentists depending on the complexity of the actual treatment provided. Exempt patients pay no charges. For a single filling, excluding root fillings, the charge for a patient paying 80 per cent. of the cost would be between £4·24 and £11·00. For a single crown, the patient's charge would be between £41·52 and £59·32. For a course of bridgework, the patient's charge would be between £184·24 and the maximum of £275 for a single course of treatment.

The effect of each 5 per cent. increase would be to raise the patient's charge in the examples given above by £0·21, £0·55, £2·08, £2·97 and £9·21 respectively, but not beyond the maximum of £275.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of dental treatment have been given to expectant and nursing mothers in each of the last 10 years; and what was the cost of the courses in each of the last 10 years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is provided in the table.

General dental services number and gross cost of courses of treatment for expectant and nursing mothers from 1984 to 1993-94[1] adults England

Year	Courses of treatment: Total Number	[2]Expectant mothers Number	[2]Nursing mothers Number	Gross cost: Total £	[2]Expectant mothers £	[2]Nursing mothers £
1983	886,090	—	—	24,593,360	—	—
1984	890,470	—	—	26,909,170	—	—
1985	903,760	—	—	28,676,670	—	—
1986-87	968,720	—	—	33,916,030	—	—
1987-88	978,770	—	—	34,784,740	—	—
1988-89	1,015,140	—	—	38,843,190	—	—
1989-90	1,044,250	—	—	40,523,920	—	—
[3]1990-91	—	—	—	—	—	—
1991-92	1,117,865	452,555	665,310	45,173,918	15,074,247	30,900,671
1992-93	1,116,531	443,922	672,609	42,846,329	14,133,933	28,712,396
[4]1993-94	1,060,683	429,382	631,301	35,990,624	12,327,137	23,663,487

Notes:
[1] Data for 1978 to 1985 are available for calendar year only.
[2] Separate data for expectant and nursing mothers are not available before 1991-92.
[3] Data for 1990-91 are not available.
[4] These figures are estimated using 5 per cent. sample; complete data are not yet available.
Source: Dental Practice Board.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of dental treatment have been given to patients who pay 80 per cent. of the cost of treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is estimated that 21·7 million courses of treatment were completed between 1 April 1993 and 31 May 1994 for which no exemption or full or partial remission was claimed.[1] Some of these courses of treatment will have been affected by the operation of the maximum charge and some will have been started before 1 April 1993—when the 80 per cent. proportion came into effect—and will therefore have been paid at an earlier rate.
[1] Estimated from a 5 per cent. sample of courses of treatments.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* adults and *(b)* children, who are registered with a dentist, are exempt from paying charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: All children are exempt from national health service dental charges. It is not possible to quantify the number of adult patients registered with a dentist who qualify for exemption.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost per adult patient for each course of dental treatment in each year from 1990-91 to 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: The direct cost for a course of treatment for an adult patient is the fee paid to the dentist. The table shows the average fee in each year.

Average cost per adult course of treatment England

Year	Average cost (£)
1990-91	36·20
1991-92	39·80
1992-93	39·11
1993-94	36·18

Source: Dental Practice Board.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount raised from all charges on NHS dental services.

Dr. Mawhinney: Provisional data for 1993-94 indicates that patient charge income from the general dental services was £367 million, net of refunds to patients. Information is not available centrally on the small amount of income raised by the limited range of patient charges applicable in the community and hospital dental services.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when she will be publishing her response to the report by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield on dental remuneration;
(2) when she will be publishing the oral health strategy for England; and what status it will have when it is published.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government's response to Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report will be published in due course. The oral health strategy for England will be published at or around the same time. The strategy will review the present state of oral health in England and set out objectives for the future.

Community Nurses

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to empower general practitioner fundholders to employ community nurses directly; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no immediate plans to do so.

Orthodontic Treatment

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS episodes of orthodontic treatment there were for the period 1983 to 1993; and what was the cost of NHS orthodontic treatment for the same period.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* No consistent data are available until 1991-92. Data from 1991-92 onwards are shown in the table.

General dental services: courses of orthodontic treatment England and Wales

Year	Number (thousands)	Cost (£ million)
1991-92	280	30·8
1992-93	340	36·0

Source: Dental Practice Board.

NHS Staff

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were employed at the latest available date for each grade in the administrative and clerical pay group and of the ancillary staffs pay group of the national health service, for grades one to 30 in the senior managers pay group, for each grade in the ambulance staffs pay group and the ambulance officers pay group, and for general managers and chief executives in the national health service; and if she will express the figures as numbers and as full-time equivalents.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 25 April 1994]:* The latest available information by grade and by gender for the relevant staff groups will be placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Private Members' Bills

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what occasions since April 1992 Ministers from his Department have *(a)* requested parliamentary counsel to assist in preparing amendments to private Members' Bills on behalf of other private Members and *(b)* authorised officials to instruct parliamentary counsel to prepare amendments which were subsequently passed to private Members.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Parliamentary counsel does not draft on behalf of private Members but on the instructions of Departments acting on the authority of Ministers. On one occasion since April 1992, in respect of the Civil Rights (Disabled) Persons Bill, Employment Department Ministers agreed that instructions should go to parliamentary counsel for amendments to a private Members' Bill with the intention that these should be tabled by the Government. These amendments were subsequently passed to private Members.

European Committee of the Regions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on what contacts his Department has had with the European Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department is in contact with the European Committee of the Regions through directors of Government offices for the regions, several of whom have had meetings with members and alternate members of the committee.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Hunt Trespass

Mr. Morley: To ask the Attorney-General if he will place a copy of his guidelines relating to hunt trespass on railway lines in the Library.

The Attorney-General: I have issued no guidelines of the nature suggested by the hon. Member.

Euromac Ltd.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what investigation he has made into the reasons for and conduct of the prosecution of Mr. Ali Ashour Daghir and Jeanine Speckman of Euromac Ltd., following their release as a result of a decision of the Court of Appeal.

The Attorney-General: None.

General Pinochet

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received respecting the bringing of criminal charges by the United Kingdom against General Augusto Pinochet; and if he will respond positively to such requests.

The Attorney-General: Amnesty International (British Section) requested that I should either initiate a prosecution against General Pinochet for alleged offences contrary to section 134 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 or grant consent for a prosecution to be brought. My office responded explaining that I do not myself investigate alleged crime or initiate criminal proceedings. Any action by the public prosecuting authorities would need to be preceded by a criminal investigation. Amnesty International was advised that, if it considered that the public prosecuting authorities in this country should take action, the proper course would be for them to place any evidence in the hands of the police and general guidance was given as to the evidence required to support any application for consent.

EDUCATION

Student Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations he has received over the last 18 months on the subject of discretionary grants for students.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this subject.

Student Numbers

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what has been the total number of students attending university and colleges in each of the last three years;

(2) what was the number of students attending universities and colleges who are aged over 35, 40 and 45 years, for the latest available period.

Mr. Boswell: The numbers of United Kingdom domiciled higher education students in England were 800,600, 891,200 and 995,200 in academic years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 respectively. The numbers of students aged 35 or over in 1992-93 on the same basis were 146,500. Information on the other age groups is not readily available.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the projected number of higher education franchised students in further education colleges for 1994-95; and what was the figure for the year in which the higher education students early statistics survey was last done.

Mr. Boswell: In the academic year 1993-94, the higher education students early statistics survey showed an estimated 43,000 franchised home and EC fee-paying HE students in further education colleges. The number of franchised HE students in FE colleges in 1994-95 will depend on decisions taken by individual HE institutions on how and where to deliver the teaching supported by HEFCE funding allocations.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which grant-maintained schools, under section 93 of the Education Act 1993, have been transferred from one former maintaining local education authority to another for the purpose of the calculation and recovery of annual maintenance grant by the Funding Agency for Schools; what were the local education authorities in each case; and what was the effect on the annual maintenance grant of each school concerned.

Mr. Robin Squire *[pursuant to his reply, 18 May 1994, Official Report, c. 499]:* I originally stated that only one operating grant-maintained school, All Hallows Roman Catholic school, formerly maintained by Hampshire local education authority and located within the boundaries of Surrey, had been affected by section 93 of the Education Act 1993. Further information has since been received by the Department indicating that the London Nautical school, formerly maintained by Southwark LEA, is located within the boundaries of Lambeth. The Funding Agency for Schools is currently considering the basis for the determination of the school's grant for 1994-95. In addition, Hockerill school, which began operating as a GM school on 1 June, was formerly maintained by Essex LEA, but is located within the boundaries of Hertfordshire. The funding agency is currently consulting on the school's grant for 1994-95.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Moorland

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects to implement a scheme for moorland areas under the EU agri-environmental programme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The details of this scheme are under active consideration following a change in the quota transfer rules. We hope to be able to launch the scheme before the end of this year.

Common Land

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress she has made in discussions with agricultural interests on the timetable for the introduction of the proposals of the Common Land Forum for legislation to resolve anomalies; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Department of Environment is currently formulating proposals to tackle the most immediate difficulties on common land and, in this context, has had discussions with agricultural organisations among others.

Drift Nets

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on compliance with the EU ban on drift nets over 2·5 km long.

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom industry was reminded earlier this year that drift nets longer than 2·5 km were prohibited. Subsequently the Commission proposed that enforcement on the north east Atlantic drift net tuna fishery, which is prosecuted principally by French, but also by Irish and British vessels should be enhanced to ensure improved compliance with the regulations in force, including the ban on the use of nets longer than 2·5 km. I have made it clear that I am ready to examine additional cost-effective enforcement measures constructively. National enforcement procedures are kept under review and varied when appropriate.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of payments made under last year's main arable area payments scheme in each county of England in respect of *(a)* cereals, *(b)* oilseeds, *(c)* protein crops, *(d)* linseed and *(e)* set-aside.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The table gives the total payments claimed in 1993 for cereals, oilseeds, protein crops and set-aside on land situated in each county of England. The total amounts paid will have been slightly lower because of reductions made for various reasons. However, since such reductions normally have to be calculated on the basis of the total claim, which may include land in more than one county, it is not possible to give figures for the total amounts paid on a county basis. Linseed was not included in the scheme until 1993-94 and county-based figures are not available for 1992-93.

	Cereals £	*Oilseeds* £	*Protein crops* £	*Set-aside* £	*Total* £
Avon	1,263,110	460,557	205,187	511,551	2,440,405
Bedfordshire	5,060,128	3,267,651	2,628,276	2,419,604	13,375,657
Berkshire	3,568,382	1,835,365	353,265	1,427,301	7,184,312
Buckinghamshire	4,142,939	3,321,845	1,793,044	2,043,092	11,300,919
Cambridgeshire	16,635,924	6,100,373	6,974,190	7,204,304	36,914,791
Cheshire	1,780,105	589,330	337,828	700,326	3,407,590
Cleveland	1,445,379	821,399	229,832	591,444	3,088,054
County Durham	3,596,620	2,216,667	315,522	1,545,029	7,673,839
Cornwall	2,531,028	450,525	374,434	989,125	4,345,111
Cumbria	720,235	118,848	11,409	265,105	1,115,598
Derbyshire	2,584,475	1,473,739	604,494	1,155,869	5,818,577
Devon	4,274,237	649,056	1,142,828	1,703,893	7,770,015
Dorset	5,616,807	682,290	1,057,228	2,067,180	9,423,504
East Sussex	2,329,667	1,148,079	660,075	1,019,306	5,157,127

	Cereals £	Oilseeds £	Protein crops £	Set-aside £	Total £
Essex	16,053,877	7,973,011	6,094,061	7,106,416	37,227,364
Gloucestershire	6,312,976	3,891,434	1,871,244	2,816,647	14,892,302
Greater Manchester	407,341	170,722	122,700	175,019	875,783
Hampshire	10,752,141	3,407,796	2,434,460	3,976,396	20,570,793
Hereford and Worcestershire	7,700,175	2,978,188	3,205,633	3,433,498	17,317,494
Hertfordshire	6,080,991	2,729,974	2,498,086	2,696,533	14,005,584
Humberside	18,726,645	6,241,866	7,116,120	7,838,505	39,923,137
Isle of Wight	795,051	313,488	262,757	289,895	1,661,192
Kent	8,733,521	6,343,054	4,020,186	4,072,982	23,169,743
Lancashire	1,315,884	396,579	663,464	508,987	2,884,913
Leicestershire	7,917,287	5,151,317	3,896,942	3,797,855	20,763,401
Lincolnshire	29,642,531	10,635,771	13,984,261	12,882,312	67,144,874
Merseyside	740,434	253,374	314,566	314,379	1,622,752
Norfolk	21,513,571	2,126,744	6,427,548	8,394,303	38,462,166
North Yorkshire	18,974,064	6,110,437	4,588,308	7,722,108	37,394,918
Northamptonshire	8,512,313	6,787,823	4,796,043	4,366,080	24,462,257
Northumberland	8,244,767	4,439,934	845,488	3,364,373	16,894,563
Nottinghamshire	7,779,274	3,852,044	2,924,559	3,460,257	18,016,135
Oxfordshire	9,951,094	6,718,368	2,651,441	4,390,622	23,711,525
Shropshire	7,576,999	1,116,354	1,573,403	2,917,073	13,183,829
Somerset	4,007,406	650,164	1,315,194	1,567,290	7,540,054
South Yorkshire	3,368,107	1,963,770	1,433,119	1,559,266	8,324,261
Staffordshire	3,934,570	1,486,400	1,069,211	1,599,768	8,089,950
Suffolk	17,586,154	4,276,384	6,526,543	7,384,311	35,773,392
Surrey	1,027,695	649,340	351,365	485,067	2,513,467
Tyne and Wear	741,792	610,103	29,078	311,713	1,692,686
West Midlands	458,864	283,127	84,256	224,509	1,050,755
West Sussex	3,906,997	1,390,040	1,762,035	1,659,823	8,718,895
Warwickshire	6,021,458	4,544,970	3,111,537	2,989,801	16,667,766
West Yorkshire	2,137,691	967,120	573,338	929,196	4,607,345
Wiltshire	11,213,128	4,337,627	1,824,493	4,479,427	21,854,675
TOTAL	308,034,248	126,171,763	105,162,516	131,521,783	670,890,310

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is her estimate of payments to be made under this year's main arable area payments scheme in each county of England in respect of *(a)* cereals, *(b)* oilseeds, *(c)* protein crops, *(d)* linseed and *(e)* set aside.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Forward estimates are not made on a county basis. Current estimates for total payments in England under the main arable area payments scheme are:

	£
(a) cereals	413,222,528
(b) oilseeds	136,070,860
(c) protein crops	85,940,727
(d) linseed	63,231,644
(e) set-aside	194,383,962
Total	892,849,721

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment her Department has made of the overall environmental quality of the arable areas in England for which payments under the main arable area payments scheme are being made; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A three-year environmental and agronomic evaluation of set-aside under the arable area payments scheme is currently being commissioned, and is to start this autumn. The evaluation will identify the environmental and agronomic impact of different management conditions on the set-aside land itself, and on neighbouring and subsequent arable crops.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps she intends to take to prevent environmental damage and improve environmental quality on land on which arable area payments are made.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the information in the reply I gave him on 14 June, *Official Report*, column *444*.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost to her department of advertising in the media that 15 May 1994 was the deadline for receipt of completed area aid applications under the IACS; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The cost of advertising the 15 May 1994 deadline for IACS applications in the national farming press was £16,694 including production, advertising charges and VAT.

The aid available under the common agriculture policy schemes which require submission of an IACS form is an important part of the income of many farmers. I considered it vital to ensure that there was wide publicity in respect of the deadline because 1994 is only the second year of IACS operation and because two extra schemes were subject to the IACS requirements this year.

Fisheries, Cornwall

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, fisheries and Food if she will make a statement about the effect on the fishing industry in south Cornwall of the Ministry of Defence's proposal to site a naval firing range off Dodman point.

Mr. Jack: The Ministry of Defence has consulted widely about its proposals to move the naval gunfire support training area from Portland to Dodman point and has arranged meetings and a demonstration firing to inform fishermen of their intentions.

I understand that a feature of gunfire support training is that the Royal Navy works around and does not disrupt fishing operations or disturb other marine activity. However, the area adjacent to Dodman point is regularly fished by a number of mainly inshore vessels from local ports and I am aware that considerable local concern has been expressed. MAFF officials have received assurances that MoD will give very careful consideration to the objections expressed by local fishing organisations.

MoD is now analysing the comments received during the consultation period, which ended on 10 June, before reaching any decision.

Less-favoured Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will provide figures for each year since 1979 for what was the total area of agricultural land in the English less-favoured areas in hectares in each year since 1979; and what are these figures as a percentage of the total current English less-favoured areas.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The table shows the total area of land in England, designated as less favoured, in each year in which additional land has been designated and expresses this as a proportion of the current area of designated land.

Total area in England designated as less favoured

	Area designated as less favoured ('000 hectares)	As a proportion of total land currently designated per cent.
1975	1,476·0	77·8
1984	1,889·4	99·6
1990	1,897·8	100·0

WALES

Cereals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average cereal yields achieved on farms in *(a)* less favoured areas and *(b)* non-less favoured areas in Wales for each year from 1986 to 1990, excluding the highest and lowest values; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Estimates of cereal yields are derived from a sample survey, the cereals production survey and from the June agicultural census, both conducted jointly by MAFF and the Welsh Office. The sample survey is not specifically designed for results to be produced at below an all-Wales level and so the average yields are subject to a greater margin of error than for Wales as a whole. The average values shown in the final row of the table are estimated to be accurate to within plus or minus 20 per cent. The requested information is shown in the table. I have set out the position in England for the purpose of comparison.

Cereal yield estimates

Yield (tonnes per heactare)

Year	Wales		England	
	Farms wholly within less favoured areas	Farms wholly outside less favoured areas	Farms wholly within less favoured areas	Farms wholly outside less favoured areas
1986	4·91	5·47	4·97	6·28
1987	4·67	4·85	5·39	5·61
1988	4·41	5·02	5·13	5·49
1989	4·18	4·36	5·02	6·03
1990	4·50	4·85	5·96	6·23
Average 1986-90[1]	4·53	4·91	5·18	5·96

[1] In each case excluding the year with the highest yield and the year with the lowest yield during the period.

Medical Negligence Claims

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds his Department has available for statutory or non-statutory contingent liabilities for claims of medical or surgical negligence against GP fundholders.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None of the Welsh Office funds are available to meet liabilities for claims of clinical negligence against GP fundholders. All general practitioners are obliged to make their own arrangements to cover such risks.

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leukosis.

Mr. Redwood: I know of none at 15 June 1994.

Flood and Storm Emergency Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he made in 1993-94 for flood and storm emergency services financial assistance to local authorities; and what provision he is making for 1994-95.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local authorities are expected to make provision for responding to emergencies such as storms and floods when setting their budgets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may provide extra financial assistance for large scale emergencies under the Bellwin scheme in accordance with section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In 1993-94 Bellwin payments of £3·76 million have been made. Provision for 1994-95 is £50,000.

Groundwork Trusts

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library details of the financial contribution of his Department to the groundwork trusts in Wales in *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1992-93 and 1993-94 the Welsh Office made the following contributions towards the administrative costs of the four groundwork trusts in Wales and to environmental improvement projects they have undertaken.

£

	1992-93	1993-94
Core funding grant	292,081	329,407
European regional development fund	313,926	639,311
Urban programme	710,000	689,540
Environment Wales	60,389	81,408
TOTAL	1,376,396	1,739,666

Sheep Quota

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have been made in the current year for category 3 sheep quota from the national reserve; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: We have received 2,011 applications —1,745 from producers in the less-favoured area in Wales and 266 from producers who fall within the Great Britain lowland—to category 3 of the 1993 sheep national reserves.

These applications will be considered against the criteria established in S.I. 1993 No. 3036, and individual producers notified of the outcome in due course.

Community Care

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amounts were spent on the community care programme for each county council area, each district council area and for Wales as a whole since the introduction of the programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the amounts spent by local authorities on the care in the community programme is not collected centrally. However, the amounts identified within the overall standard spending assessments for each county in Wales are given in the following table. Separately identifiable provision was not made for district councils.

Provision for care in the community identified within standard spending assessments

£ million

	1993-94	1994-95
Clwyd	6·8	14·4
Dyfed	4·6	10·7
Gwent	5·5	12·6
Gwynedd	3·5	8·0
Mid Glamorgan	5·1	13·6
Powys	1·6	3·6
South Glamorgan	4·9	11·0
West Glamorgan	5·4	12·1
WALES	37·5	86·0

ERDF Grants

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total of European regional development fund grants accruing to local authorities in Wales in each of the most recent five years; if he will make a statement clarifying the manner in which such grants are taken into account in assessing the standard spending assessments of local authorities in Wales; and what recent changes there have been in such procedures.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The total amount of ERDF paid to local authorities in Wales in each of the most recent five years is provided in the following table.

Each local authority's outstanding loan debt is taken into account when it's standard spending assessment is determined.

Since ERDF grants are used to redeem debt, the relevant debt figures for each authority is reduced annually by the amount of ERDF grant it has received up to the end of the last full financial year for which payments information is available. This procedure, which is agreed with the Welsh local authority associations, has not changed in recent years. Further details may be found in the "Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1994-95" (HC 168).

ERDF Grant Payments made to Local Authorities by Financial Year

Authority	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £	1992-93 £	1993-94 £
Aberconwy	0	0	0	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	0	308,000	677,000	4,000	138,000
Arfon	58,000	0	0	65,000	344,000
Blaenau Gwent	105,000	73,000	407,000	150,000	398,000
Brecknock	10,000	0	117,000	0	107,000
Cardiff	1,841,000	273,000	687,000	1,982,000	72,000
Carmarthen	98,000	0	127,000	0	0
Ceredigion	60,000	66,000	369,000	570,000	249,000
Clwyd	1,501,000	292,000	2,318,000	2,123,000	1,721,000
Colwyn	0	0	0	0	159,000
Cynon Valley	203,000	85,000	288,000	430,000	1,400,000
Delyn	292,000	856,000	764,000	431,000	496,000
Dinefwr	201,000	1,000	0	575,000	131,000
Dwyfor	0	1,141,000	826,000	858,000	322,000
Dyfed	175,000	1,858,000	10,640,000	1,043,000	4,053,000
Glyndwr	0	74,000	3,000	0	0
Gwent	115,000	1,315,000	3,634,000	1,565,000	2,791,000
Gwynedd	1,448,000	1,091,000	2,492,000	595,000	1,541,000
Islwyn	6,000	0	1,116,000	121,000	834,000

Authority	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £	1992-93 £	1993-94 £
Llanelli	465,000	25,000	574,000	1,139,000	1,032,000
Lliw Valley	0	0	185,000	139,000	225,000
Meirionnydd	31,000	780,000	784,000	1,698,000	997,000
Merthyr Tydfil	10,000	13,000	0	0	147,000
Mid Glamorgan	4,956,000	4,291,000	1,997,000	3,694,000	4,448,000
Monmouth	0	0	121,000	73,000	38,000
Montgomeryshire	642,000	24,000	1,270,000	1,074,000	329,000
Neath	74,000	37,000	709,000	0	374,000
Newport	261,000	358,000	741,000	1,960,000	765,000
Ogwr	708,000	83,000	0	96,000	274,000
Port Talbot	81,000	0	0	0	47,000
Powys	1,023,000	249,000	1,824,000	1,815,000	661,000
Preseli Pembroke	58,000	0	1,158,000	556,000	173,000
Radnorshire	31,000	0	316,000	745,000	169,000
Rhondda	415,000	658,000	907,000	270,000	807,000
Rhuddlan	3,000	981,000	1,956,000	1,682,000	1,011,000
Rhymney Valley	288,000	77,000	539,000	185,000	289,000
South Glamorgan	286,000	69,000	2,689,000	5,210,000	1,016,000
South Pembrokeshire	405,000	288,000	43,000	0	131,000
Swansea	0	3,924,000	215,000	1,228,000	1,456,000
Taff Ely	0	19,000	97,000	238,000	277,000
Torfaen	120,000	706,000	383,000	1,219,000	1,015,000
Vale of Glamorgan	0	6,000	517,000	205,000	155,000
West Glamorgan	1,556,000	291,000	5,582,000	2,715,000	2,386,000
Wrexham Maelor	0	240,000	2,259,000	476,000	132,000
Ynys Môn	710,000	436,000	1,404,000	40,000	82,000
Total	18,218,000	20,988,000	50,735,000	36,969,000	33,192,000

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Office Furnishings

39. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee how much will be spent in the next two financial years on office furnishing in the parliamentary estate.

Mr. Channon: Under the 10-year rolling programme of works some £260,000 has been set aside for office furniture in each of the next two financial years.

Child Care

40. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission what is the timetable for progress on child care arrangements in Parliament.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice).

European Debates

46. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what considerations he takes into account when placing notices in the Order Paper to suspend Standing Order No. 102 relating to debates on matters concerning the European Community and Union.

Mr. Newton: A motion is occasionally tabled to de-refer a European Community document which stands referred to a European Standing Committee, so that it may be debated on the Floor of the House. The considerations will vary depending on the nature of the document concerned.

Sitting Hours

48. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress he has made in respect of reforming the sittings arrangements for the House.

Mr. Newton: I am currently engaged in constructive discussions with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). Our aim is to find ways of enabling the House to do its business in more sensible ways, at more sensible hours, without either unacceptably reducing the Government's capacity to carry their programme or unacceptably reducing the Opposition's flexibility in deploying and pressing their case. It is my hope that those discussions will enable us to map the way forward before the summer recess.

EC Legislation

49. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has considered to improve the scrutiny of EC legislation by the United Kingdom Parliament in advance of its enactment by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Newton: I expect to respond shortly to the report by the Select Committee on European Legislation entitled "Scrutiny after Maastricht" (First Special Report, 1993-94) which contained detailed proposals for the scrutiny of legislative proposals under the co-decision procedure.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list those hon. Members who have had oral questions 1 to 10 to the Secretary of State for Employment more than three times during 1994.

Mr. Newton: None.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list those hon. Members who have had questions 1 to 6 to the Prime Minister more than four times in 1994 to date.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) has had five such questions to the Prime Minister.

Visitors

41. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his timetable for improving facilities for visitors to the House of Commons.

Mr. Newton: It is hoped that the House will have an opportunity to consider the recommendations contained in the Catering Committee's First Report of Session 1992-93 on Line of Route facilities before the summer recess.

TRANSPORT

Piggyback Rail System

8. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to support the introduction of a lorry piggyback rail system between the channel tunnel and the midlands.

Mr. Freeman: The proposal to build a piggyback freight railway from the midlands to the channel tunnel is being put forward by a private sector group. It is for them to seek planning permission and finance. The Government have not been asked to assist the project. More generally, we welcome in principle any worthwhile proposal to ship more freight by rail, either conventional containers or the whole lorry trailer and load.

London Underground

10. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has in respect of train maintenance on the London underground.

Mr. Norris: The maintenance of London's underground system is an operational matter for London Underground Limited.

Road Traffic, Eastbourne

13. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last had the opportunity to consider the road traffic needs of Eastbourne.

Mr. Key: Last month, when I visited the area.

Runway Capacity

14. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the Government's response to the consultation on the report on runway capacity in the south east.

Mr. Norris: We are currently considering the responses to the RUCATSE consultation and expect to respond before the end of the year.

Motorways

15. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the proportion of car owners who regularly use motorways.

Mr. Key: Research commissioned by the Department and summarised in the Green Paper, "Paying for Better Motorways" (Cm 2200), indicates that only about half of car drivers use motorways most months or more frequently.

River Crossings

16. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to make a further statement on river crossings and improved transport facilities in south-east London.

Mr. Norris: I am reviewing the strategy for river crossings in east London. I hope to make an announcement later this summer.

Rail Privatisation

18. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessments he has made of the effects on passengers resulting from plans to privatise the railways.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) earlier today.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what indications there are from previous privatisations of transport industries of the effects on passengers of the privatisation of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Previous privatisations have consistently led to improved services for customers and greater efficiency for the industries concerned. The same will happen on the railways.

26. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the line closures that are likely to result from the privatisation of British Rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There is no reason for privatisation to lead to any increase in the number of lines or stations being proposed for closure. The safeguards are at least as strong as they have been in the past.

Aircraft Noise, Gatwick

19. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of noise caused by night-time commercial aircraft movements around Gatwick airport.

Mr. Norris: The night restrictions that we have set at Gatwick are designed to keep the night noise level below that in summer 1988.

Rail Franchises

20. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the timetable for franchising railway services.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set a target timetable for the franchising of services by the franchising director. The first six franchises are to be awarded by the end of 1995, and over half of British Rail's current passenger services are to be

franchised by April 1996. The franchising director published a programme in April setting out how he intends to meet these targets.

Rail Services (Competition)

21. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what results he expects from the introduction of competition in terms of improving rail services.

Mr. Freeman: Evidence from previous transport privatisations shows that the introduction of competition encourages the development of better quality services. I am confident that customers—passengers and freight consignors—will benefit from more services of higher quality, improved efficiency and better value for money.

Transatlantic Air Routes

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made towards liberalisation of transatlantic air routes.

23. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made towards liberalisation of transatlantic air routes.

Mr. Norris: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport met the US transportation secretary last month he once again signalled the United Kingdom's willingness to continue talks. We hope that the United Kingdom's approval of the Virgin/Delta deal will help get the talks going again.

A12

24. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about proposals for a new junction to be constructed on the A12 to join with the A134 at Great Hawkesley.

Mr. Key: The Department has no plans to increase capacity on this section of the A12, nor to construct any new junctions. We would therefore expect the cost of any new A12-A134 interchange which might be needed to facilitate development to be met by the developers.

Railtrack

25. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of occasions, the reasons, and the cost to public funds of the use of helicopters by employees of Railtrack.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for Railtrack, but I understand from it that there has been no use of helicopters by its employees.

Air Fares

27. **Mr. Deva:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect the third aviation package is having on air fares in Europe.

Mr. Norris: EC carriers are now free to set their own fares, and the EC licensing and market access provisions encourage competition. Since the beginning of 1993 we have seen some straight fare reductions, and various offers of seasonal tickets and promotional fares.

Residential Areas

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce the volume and speed of traffic in residential areas.

Mr. Key: It is for local highway authorities to design schemes which control the volume and speed of traffic on their roads. My Department provides technical advice on the regulations and individual design features in circulars and traffic advisory leaflets.

Kidderminster, Blakedown, Hagley Bypass

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the public costs associated with the Kidderminster, Blakedown. Hagley bypass incurred so far; and if he will break this down between *(a)* design, *(b)* compulsory purchase and *(c)* public inquiry costs.

Mr. Key: The question relates to matters which are the responsibility of the Highways Agency; the chief executive will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Anthony Coombs, dated 16 June 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Transport about the public costs incurred so far with the Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass and if he would give a breakdown between: *(a)* design, *(b)* compulsory purchase and *(c)* public inquiry.

The overall cost so far is about £15·4 million (inclusive of VAT). This does not include in-house staff costs, which are not readily available but are comparatively small.

Of this, design costs amount ot £1·95 million. This includes the costs of a number of consultants, ground investigation works and an archaeological survey, and of printing and compiling a range of documents.

We have not yet reached compulsory purchase stage, but we have acquired property under either statutory or discretionary blight at a cost of £13·26 million. We will however be in a position to sell many of these properties after completion of the scheme and in the meantime many are rented to tenants. The net cost will therefore be lower.

The direct cost of the Public Inquiry was about £189,000, not including the costs of our consultants for this purpose, which are included in the figures above.

Cones Hotline

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's cones inquiry line.

Mr. Key: As the cones hotline is not an operational matter for the Highways Agency, the chief executive has written to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Brian Donohue dated 16 June 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he would make a statement on the Department's cones enquiry line. As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, I am replying to your question.

The cones hotline has been running for exactly two years. In that time it has dealt with 5,200 telephone calls of which just over 3,000 have been pursued as formal complaints or requests for information. It gives motorists direct access to the highway authority responsible for the motorway and trunk road network; and as such fits squarely with the wider Citizen's Charter initiative and the policy of improving driver information.

The Cones Hotline is covered by the Highways Agency's 'Road User's Charter' which sets out standards of service for the

road network. In following this we undertake to deal with Hotline enquiries as efficiently as possible; and if it is established that there is no good reason for cones to be present, we undertake to get them removed.

We have recently invited expressions of interest, through the EC Journal, from specialist companies who might be well placed to run the Cones Hotline on the Agency's behalf. This is part of a continuing review to ensure that the Hotline provides the most efficient and effective service.

Railway Property (Hunt Trespass)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of hunt trespass on railway property have been recorded to date in 1994.

Mr. Freeman: There are six recorded incidents of hunt trespass on railway property to date this year.

Marine Safety

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he proposes to introduce the proposed 20 per cent. efficiency savings into the Marine Safety Agency.

Mr. Norris: Plans for delivering this saving are still being formulated.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 4 May, *Official Report*, column *565*, what percentage of male grade 7s received *(a)* box 1 and *(b)* box 2 markings in 1991-92, what were the figures for typists; what proportion of typists were (i) male and (ii) female; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: In the 1991-92 reporting year, 4·7 per cent. of male grade 7s received box 1 and 52·4 per cent. box 2 performance markings. No male typist received a box 1 or 2 marking. 0·3 per cent. of typist grades were male and 99·7 per cent. female.

DISC Project

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *3*, what is the total cost to date of the DISC network policy project; and what tangible results have been obtained from the expenditure thereon.

Mr. Norris: The DISC network policy project finished in July 1993 when a policy governing the provision of wide-area computer network services was endorsed by the departmental Information Systems Committee. The project to develop the policy cost approximately £117,000—made up of consulting fees and official time. The end product was a policy that defines the framework within which the Department's executive agencies and other units address their individual requirements for data communications and the mechanism by which the Department as a whole achieves economies of scale in meeting these requirements.

Heathrow and Gatwick Airports

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the latest projections he has received from United Kingdom airlines of the proportion of both full day peak and morning peak time slots scheduled for a typical mid-August 1994 week at Heathrow and Gatwick as a proportion of total slots available for both periods.

Mr. Norris: In a 1994 mid-August week the proportions of available slots allocated to airlines in the full-day peak—0700-2059—and the morning peak—0700-1159—are, respectively, 96·8 per cent. and 98·5 per cent. at Heathrow, and 95·2 per cent. and 95·9 per cent. at Gatwick.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *3*, on the study of EC directives undertaken by Coopers and Lybrand, what consideration was given to using civil service staff to undertake the work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Support from consultants was used as resources were not available within the Department to carry out all the work required in the limited time available.

Information Campaigns

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *833*, if he will list the budgets for the various public information campaigns for the current financial year; and if he will make a statement on the extent to which the budgets will be affected following his recent statement of the 20 per cent. efficiency gains.

Mr. Norris: The budgets provisionally allocated to the various public information campaigns planned for the current financial year are as follows:

	£ million
Road safety campaigns	6·30
drink drive	2·50
kill your speed and child road safety	3·00
other road safety	0·80
Other transport safety and public information campaigns	*0·65*

These budgets are not affected by the recently announced 20 per cent. efficiency gains statement, but as with all voted expenditure they are constantly reviewed in the light of the priorities and the resources available to meet them.

Responsibility for marine and coastal public information campaigns and the relevant budgets is being transferred to the Marine Safety Agency and the Coastguard Agency.

Rail Staff Pay Offer

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he or any of his Ministers or civil servants had any communications with members of the board of British Rail or Railtrack on the subject of the signalling staff pay offer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Negotiations about the pay of signalling staff are a matter for Railtrack. But I, my Ministers and senior civil servants have made clear to members of the boards of British Railways and Railtrack on a number of occasions the importance which the Government attach to controlling public expenditure and restraining paybill costs.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the approximate cost of preparation and auxiliary work occasioned by works for the Jubilee line at Westminster station that are not part of the contracts for that line; and what is the principal expenditures and the source of funding from *(a)* public and *(b)* private bodies.

Mr. Norris: In the parliamentary summer recesses of 1992 and 1993, London Underground Limited spent a total of around £3 million on utility diversions in the Westminster station area. All that expenditure was financed by the Government's grant to London Transport.

A64

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last travelled in his official capacity along the A64 from York to Scarborough.

Mr. MacGregor: I have never travelled along the whole route in my official capacity but have frequently done so non-officially.

Buses, London

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* double decker and *(b)* single decker public service buses are estimated to be on London's roads at the latest available date; how many passengers they carried; what were the comparable figures five years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: In 1992-93 there were 3,649 double decker and 1,395 single decker—including 1,232 midi and mini type—London Transport buses, excluding tendered service buses run by companies other than London Buses Ltd. In 1987-88, the comparable figures were 4,389 double decker and 624 single decker—including 170 midi and mini type.

For total passenger figures, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 29 November 1993 at column *340*. Passenger figures by vehicle type are not available.

London Traffic

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the proportion of traffic within Greater London carried by *(a)* road, *(b)* rail and *(c)* river.

Mr. Norris: In 1992, it was estimated that 78 per cent. of freight lifted in Greater London, by weight, was carried by road, 17 per cent. by river and 4 per cent. by rail.

In 1991, 81 per cent. of the number of journeys made by individuals, excluding journeys involving only walking, were by road and 19 per cent. by rail. The proportion of journeys made by river was less than one tenth of 1 per cent.

SCOTLAND

Litter Bins, A9

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the outcome of the Scottish Office experiment in the reduction in the deposit of litter in lay-bys which led to the removal of litter bins from lay-bys on the A9 from Aviemore to the Slochd; when these bins will be replaced; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Environmental Protection Act 1990, which came in to force on 1 April 1991, and its associated litter code of practice transferred responsibility for sweeping and cleansing of trunk roads —other than motorways or designated special roads—from the Secretary of State to the district or island councils.

Since the removal of the litter bins from the lay-bys on the section of the A9 trunk road from Aviemore to the Slochd, only one lay-by has given cause for concern. In response to this, Badenoch and Strathspey district council replaced the litter bin and is now content with the situation. It has no plans to replace any further litter bins on this section.

Green Belt Policy

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in respect of protecting the green belt which lies between *(a)* Paisley and Elderslie and *(b)* Elderslie and Johnstone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Government's policy on protection of the green belt in Scotland is contained in Scottish Development Department circular 24/1985, a copy of which is in the House Library. I shall arrange for a copy to be sent to the hon. Member.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list individuals and organisations who responded to the consultation document on the proposal for a national health servive trust to merge the Royal Scottish National hospital with Forth Valley Healthcare; who was in favour of the proposal; and who was against.

Mr. Stewart: Copies of all comments received in response to the public consultation have been retained by Forth Valley health board and are available for inspection. In due course a copy will also be available for inspection in the Library of the Scottish Office at St. Andrew's house, Edinburgh.

There were 32 responses, most of which provided comments but did not specifically indicate support or opposition to the proposed merger. Clearly stated opinions indicated eight in favour and two against, as follows:

In favour

Area Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Central Regional Council
University of Stirling
Relatives Association, Royal Scottish National Hospital
Purchasing and Monitoring Team on Priority and Community Services, Forth Valley Health Board
Forth Valley College of Nursing and Midwifery
Mr. P. Dickens, Clinical Services Manager, Royal Scottish National Hospital

Against

Mr. Dennis Canavan, MP
Dr. G. Dodds, Consultant Psychiatrist, Bellsdyke Hospital

Comments

Area Medical Committee
GP Sub-Committee
Area Pharmaceutical Committee

Area Paramedical Committee
Psychology Advisory Committee, Forth Valley Healthcare
British Medical Association
The College of Speech and Language Therapists
The Royal College of Nursing
Clackmannan District Council
Forth Valley Local Health Council
Scottish Health Visitors' Association
Friends of Bellsdyke Hospital
Stirling and District Association for Mental Health
Dr. P. Murdoch, Consultant Physician in Geriatric Medicine, Falkirk Unit
Dr. R. Hall, Interim Clinical Director (Community) Forth Valley Healthcare
Mr. and Mrs. J. McKelvie
General Adult Psychiatry Clinical Directorate, Forth Valley Healthcare
Professions Allied to Medicine, Forth Valley Healthcare
Carers' Forum

No comments
The Royal College of Midwives, Scottish Board
British Red Cross
Strathcarron Hospice

Mental Welfare Commission

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects to announce the appointments of the new members of the Mental Welfare Commission;

(2) if he will list the current members of the Mental Welfare Commission and their period of tenure.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has today announced the appointment of Mrs. Norma Bennie, Mrs. E. Faith Cotter, Mr. Donald J. MacDonald and Mr. John A. Ross as part-time commissioners to the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland. Mrs. Patricia A. Baxter has been re-appointed for a further term.

The current membership of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland is as follows:

	Year of First Appointment	*Due to Demit Office*
Chairman		
Sheriff Hazel Aronson QC	1991	1 May 1995
Full-time Medical Commissioners		
Dr. J. A. Dyer (Director)	1991	15 April 1995
Dr. A. W. Drummond	1993	31 May 1995
Full-time Social Work Commissioner		
Mrs. C. E. McGregor	1993	30 November 1997
Part-time Commissioners		
Mrs. P. A. Baxter	1990	30 April 1998
Mrs. N. Bennie	1994	31 May 1998
Mr. P. H. Brodie QC	1985	31 December 1996
Mrs. E. F. Cotter	1994	31 May 1998
Mr. R. G. Davis	1984	31 May 1996
Mrs. A. M. Green	1984	31 May 1996
Mrs. M. Jeffcoat	1992	31 May 1996
Dr. M. G. Livingston	1994	31 December 1997
Dr. E. D. A. McCall-Smith	1993	31 July 1997
Dr. R. G. McCreadie	1994	31 December 1997
Mr. D. J. MacDonald	1994	31 May 1998
Mr. J. C. Murray (Vice-Chairman)	1991	2 September 1995
Miss L. Noble	1992	31 May 1996
Mr. J. A. Ross	1994	31 May 1998
Mr. J. G. Sutherland OBE	1984	31 May 1996

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what criteria he will use for appointments to the Mental Welfare Commission;

(2) how many nominations he has received for vacancies on the Mental Welfare Commission.

Mr. Stewart: The criteria for appointments to the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland are set out in part II of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984. Commissioners are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen on the recommendation of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Before making such a recommendation, my right hon. Friend is required to consult such bodies as appear to him to be concerned.

In the past year, 11 nominations have been received for part-time vacancies on the Mental Welfare Commission. Recommendations for the appointment of full-time medical and social work commissioners are put forward following an open recruitment competition.

Housing

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number and location of unoccupied housing held by Government Departments; and what proposals he has to bring these back into use for homeless families.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is responsible only for property held by the Scottish Office. In April 1993, the Scottish Office Departments, health boards and trusts had 239 empty properties throughout Scotland out of a total stock of 1,625 properties. An agreed target was set to dispose of or bring back into use 80 of these properties by 31 March 1994. The figure achieved was 94. Sale or lease to a housing association for rent to those in housing need is one option to be considered for empty property, but the approach in each case will depend on local circumstances.

Ravenspark Hospital

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many redundancies Ayrshire and Arran health board expect to result from the closure of Ravenspark hospital; and how many of these will occur among *(a)* ancillary, *(b)* nursing and *(c)* medical staff;

(2) what assurances have been sought by Ayrshire and Arran health board or the Community Health Care NHS trust from the companies bidding for replacement provision resulting from the closure of Ravenspark hospital as regards the employment of national health service employees who will be made redundant by the closure of Ravenspark hospital.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 June 1994]:* It is anticipated that Ravenspark hospital will close in early 1995. It is too early to talk about specific redundancies at this stage.

All prospective tenderers have indicated to the health board that their recruitment programmes would give first consideration to staff currently caring for patients who will be transferred from Ravenspark hospital to the new facilities under the new ownership and management. For its part, the community healthcare trust will ensure that staff and patient welfare issues are actively addressed during closure to ensure a smooth transition in the interests of staff and of quality patient care.

Psychiatry (Statistics)

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many high-security psychiatric patients were admitted to psychiatric wards in non-high security units in Scotland in the period from 1985 to 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* None. The state hospital, Carstairs provides care for all Scottish psychiatric patients needing treatment in conditions of medium or maximum security.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the most common forms of mental illness for children and teenagers; and what was their incidence in Scotland in the period 1979 to 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* This information is not available. However, in 1993 the number of admissions to mental illness hospitals in Scotland for the under-19 age group was as follows:

	1993	*Percentage of total admissions*
Alcoholic psychosis Alcohol dependence syndrome	19	2
Drug abuse	104	11
Schizophrenic psychoses	85	9
Affective psychoses	56	6
Other psychoses	90	10
Disorders of childhood	38	4
Neurotic disorders	33	4
Depressions—non psychotic	169	16
Personality disorders	35	4
Other conditions	[1]288	31
Total	917	100

[1] Refers mainly to assessment or respite admissions.

The total numbers of admissions for this age group since 1979 were as follows:

	All admissions	*First admissions*
1979	1,032	704
1980	1,095	667
1981	1,269	720
1982	1,102	685
1983	1,145	730
1984	1,082	657
1985	1,033	613
1986	935	563
1987	941	579
1988	909	575
1989	898	530
1990	916	566
1991	961	575
1992	1,056	541
1993	917	490

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the national referral pattern for adolescent psychiatric services for Scotland; and what was the regional breakdown of contractual referral for each health region for the period 1979 to 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Information is available that shows first attendances for years 1984-93 only. However, the information is too lengthy to print in the *Official Report* so I will arrange for a copy to be sent to the hon. Member and for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House. Adolescent psychiatric clinics are provided by the boards shown. For those that do not hold separate adolescent clinics, adolescents are likely to be referred to neighbouring boards or to their own adult psychiatric services.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nursing and paramedical staff in Scotland are qualified in forensic psychiatry and working in *(a)* high security units and *(b)* admission wards in psychiatric hospitals and mental health trusts.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what capital charges were levied on each regional adolescent psychiatric unit in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* None. There are no regional adolescent psychiatric units in Scotland. Adolescent psychiatric services are part of the general psychiatric provision.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nursing and para-medical staff working in psychiatric wards in mental health trust hospitals in Scotland have sustained non-accidental injuries from patients in each year since 1985.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many psychiatric patients have been contracted out for treatment to the private sector in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* This information is not available centrally. It is for individual health boards to determine the needs of their population and to purchase psychiatric services accordingly.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds designated specifically for adolescent psychiatry there were in Scotland in each year since 1979 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Scotland average available staffed beds; Adolescent psychiatry: Years ending 31 March 1979-1993

Year	
1979	64
1980	64
1981	64
1982	64
1983	64
1984	79
1985	78
1986	76
1987	77
1988	77
1989	75
1990	67
1991	59

Year	
1992	53
[1]1993	61

[1] Year ending 31 December 1993

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the national referral patterns and regional referral patterns for all units providing psychiatric services for deaf people in Scotland in each year since 1987.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children and teenagers suffering from serious mental illnesses were admitted to psychiatric hospitals in Scotland in the period 1979 to 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The information requested is as follows:

Admissions[1] to Mental Illness and Psychiatric Units Scotland 1979-1993

	Aged 0-19 years	
Year	All Admissions	1st Admissions
1979	1,034	705
1980	1,125	670
1981	1,293	725
1982	1,134	690
1983	1,152	730
1984	1,088	658
1985	1,034	613
1986	935	563
1987	941	579
1988	910	575
1989	898	530
1990	920	566
1991	969	575
1992	1,067	541
[2]1993	923	490

[1]Excludes patients with a mental handicap diagnosis.
[2]Provisional.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many forensic psychiatric patients have been treated in Scotland in each year since 1985.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Separate information on forensic psychiatric patients is not available. The position for all mental illness and psychiatric admissions is as follows:

Admissions[1] to Mental Illness and Psychiatric Units Scotland 1985-1993

	All ages
Year	All Admissions
1985	27,158
1986	27,418
1987	27,925
1988	28,907
1989	28,786
1990	29,771
1991	29,626
1992	29,095
[2]1993	28,243

[1]Excludes patients with a Mental Handicap diagnosis.
[2]Provisional.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many extra-contractual referrals for individuals requiring specialist psychiatric services for deaf people were made in Scotland in 1993-94.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors are trained each year in forensic psychiatry; and how many qualified in forensic psychiatry are practising in the national health service in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* There are seven doctors in specialist training in forensic psychiatry in Scotland, corresponding to approximately one a year. There are 11 consultants and one associate specialist in the specialty.

Dentistry

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many general dental practitioners in Scotland received remuneration for NHS treatments in each year since 1983.

(2) how many general dental practitioners in Scotland were registered with the Dental Practice Board in each year since 1983.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* To receive remuneration for national health service treatment a dentist must be on a health board's dental list. The number of general dental practitioners registered on health board dental lists to provide national health service general dental services in Scotland is contained in the table.

Number of dentists on health board dental lists in Scotland at 31 December

Year	Number of dentists
1983	1,379
1984	1,360
1985	1,392
1986	1,456
1987	1,511
1988	1,528
1989	1,587
1990	1,626
1991	1,666
1992	1,680
1993	1,774

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general dental practitioners qualified and took up national health service practice in Scotland in each year since 1983.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The numbers of dentists who qualified are as follows:

Year	Number
1984	152
1985	153
1986	127
1987	145
1988	150
1989	146
1990	142
1991	133

Year	Number
1992	120
1993	135

Information is not held centrally on how many took up NHS practice in Scotland. In recent years most dental graduates have undertaken a year's vocational training before becoming a general dental practitioner. As from October 1993 this became mandatory.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dental de-registrations there were in Scotland in the period 1985 to 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Formal arrangements for patients to register with a specific dentist were introduced under the new contract for general dental services on 1 October 1990. Information supplied by health boards shows there have been around 17,000 de-registrations in the period October 1990 to December 1993.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for a review of orthodontic services in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* There are no plans for a review of orthodontic services specifically. However, the system of dental remuneration is currently under review, following consultation on the Bloomfield report.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many clients were registered in Scotland with general dental practitioners in each year since 1983.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Formal arrangements for patients to be registered with a specific dentist were introduced under the new contract for general dental practitioners on 1 October 1990. The number of people registered with a dentist in Scotland is contained in the table.

Number of people registered with a dentist in Scotland as at 31 March

Year	Number registered
1991	1,710,947
1992	2,485,531
1993	2,528,268
1994	2,514,816

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS episodes of orthodontic treatment there were for Scotland for the period 1983 to 1993; and what was the cost of NHS orthodontic treatment for Scotland for the same period.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* NHS orthodontic treatment is provided through the general dental service, community dental service and hospital dental service. Information on treatment and cost, where available, is shown in the tables.

Table 1
Orthodontic treatments in the General Dental Service in Scotland: 1983-1993

Year [1]	Number of treatments [2,3]	Total cost (including patient contributions)[4]
1983	18,321	1,556,020
1984	17,334	1,613,631
1985	17,794	1,882,173
1986	16,874	2,220,719
1987	15,929	2,567,395
1988	16,151	3,183,938
1989	18,499	3,445,292
1990	17,949	3,622,600
1991-92	16,305	3,009,660
1992-93	22,735	3,513,233

[1] Information is for calendar years from 1983 to 1990. From 1991-92 information is for financial years.
[2] The number of treatments is a count of the number of forms with an orthodontic appliance. This includes retention and replacement applicances.
[3] Differences in the number of treatments may be due to changes in the definition of orthodontic treatment items in 1987, 1989 and 1990.
[4] The cost of orthodontic treatment from 1983 to 1990 include examinations and study models. From 1991 the cost excludes examinations and study models.

Table 2 Orthodontic treatment episodes in the Hospital Dental Service in Scotland: 1983-1993

Year ending 31 March	New out-patients at consultant clinics	In-patient and day case discharges
1983	14,523	10
1984	14,371	1
1985	15,514	195
1986	16,059	493
1987	18,012	746
1988	19,103	891
1989	18,898	952
1990	[1]19,487	858
1991	18,825	1,089
1992	20,739	955
1993	22,597	494

[1] Estimated.
Information on costs is not available centrally.

Table 3 Orthodontic treatment episodes in the Community Dental Service in Scotland: 1988-1993

Year[1]	Number of Orthodontic Episodes of Treatment
1988	5,727
1989	7,349
1990	9,523
1991	8,550
1992	7,417
1993	6,992

[1] No information is available prior to 1988.

Information on costs is not available centrally.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of individuals who received private orthodontic treatments in Scotland during the period from 1983 to 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* No information is held on private dental treatment.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients are waiting for orthodontic treatment in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* At 31 December 1993, the latest date for which information is centrally available, there were 12 patients waiting for in-patient treatment in orthodontics and paediatric dentistry. No patients were waiting for day case treatment. Information on patients waiting for out-patient treatment is not centrally available.

Prisons

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to amend the Prison (Scotland) Rules 1952; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The draft revised Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules were issued for consultation last September. Consideration of the comments received has almost been completed and it is intended to lay the new rules before Parliament in the next few weeks.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the attendance records of individual members of prison visiting committees for the last two years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Detailed attendance figures for all individual visiting committee members are not collated centrally and any exercise to obtain comprehensive data would involve disproportionate costs.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations have been undertaken with the local authorities in Scotland about proposed changes in the membership of prison visiting committees.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The draft revised Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules, which contain proposals for changes in the constitution of prison visiting committees, were sent to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in September 1993 as part of a comprehensive consultation exercise.

Ambulance Services

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many private ambulance contracts there were for Scotland in the period 1985 to 1993;

(2) how many private patient journeys were undertaken by NHS patients in Scotland for journeys to and from *(a)* nursing homes and *(b)* private hospitals in the period from 1985 to 1993; what ambulance charges were levied on these NHS patients; and what was the total money earned from these charges for the same period;

(3) if he will list the NHS ambulance services in Scotland which have contracts with private sector health care providers.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Information is not collected centrally on private ambulance contracts, but it is considered that there has been little use if any, of such contractors by NHS bodies in Scotland since the Scottish ambulance service exists to meet the needs of NHS patients.

No charges are levied on NHS patients for any ambulance journeys provided by the Scottish ambulance service for NHS treatment in nursing homes or private hospitals. Non NHS patients are carried by the Scottish ambulance service only on the basis where there is no detriment to NHS patients. A charge is made. The total income earned in respect of such patients for the period 1991 to 1993 was £48,131.

There is only one ambulance service for the whole of Scotland and it has no contracts with any private health care provider.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Public Bodies

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what arrangements are in hand to audit non-departmental public bodies; and what improvements to those arrangements are currently being considered.

Sir Peter Hordern: The Comptroller and Auditor General is the auditor of two-thirds of non-departmental public bodies. The auditor of the remaining bodies is appointed by the responsible Secretary of State, usually from the private sector, and accounts are laid before Parliament.

In addition, as the auditor of all central Government Departments and agencies the C and AG checks the payment of grants to all public bodies funded by central Government. In most cases he has a right of access to the body receiving the money both so that he can check that the Department is supervising the spending of public money effectively and also to check that the body spends the money properly.

The recent report by the Public Accounts Committee on the proper conduct of public business suggested that the National Audit Office be enabled to examine and inspect all non-departmental public bodies and other organisations which receive the greater part of their income from central Government funds. The Government have agreed to consider the need for the C and AG to examine bodies to which he currently does not have access on a case by case basis.

National Audit Office

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission if he will make a statement about the level of funding made available to the National Audit Office to investigate changes in the proportion of moneys spent by local authorities on the various duties they performed over the last five years.

Sir Peter Hordern: The audit of local authorities is the responsibility of the Audit Commission, and does not therefore come within the remit of the Public Accounts Commission and the National Audit Office.

DEFENCE

Air Manoeuvres

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the members of each manoeuvres commission established under the Manoeuvres Act 1958 since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: It has never been necessary to invoke the powers of the Manoeuvres Act 1958 as training has been accommodated on existing MOD land, or on the occasions this has not been possible, by negotiation with the landowners concerned.

Naval Firing Range, Cornwall

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what consultations his Department has had with the Department of National Heritage concerning the siting of a naval firing range off Dodman point in Cornwall;

(2) what is his estimate of the total savings to his Department of resiting a naval firing range off Dodman point in Cornwall from Lulworth cove in Dorset;

(3) what consultations his Department has had with the Department of the Environment concerning the siting of a naval firing range off Dodman point in Cornwall;

(4) what assessment his Department has made of the impact on the local economy of the siting of a naval firing range off Dodman point in Cornwall;

(5) if he will make a statement about his Department's decision to resite the Navy's firing range from Lulworth cove in Dorset to the sea area off Dodman point in Cornwall;

(6) if he will name all the sites which are being considered as a naval firing range to replace the current range at Lulworth in Dorset.

Mr. Hanley: The proposal to establish a new naval gunfire support training area has arisen as a result of the decision to move the Royal Navy operational sea training organisation from Portland to Plymouth, which will require transfer of training currently conducted at sea off Portland to exercise areas in the channel south of Plymouth. The move will involve the transfer of some 280 RN personnel to the Plymouth area, and will create an estimated 100 civilian jobs there, as well as bringing additional revenue to the areas.

As well as undertaking extensive consultations locally, my Department has also consulted the Department of Transport, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the habitat protection branch and the water resources and marine division of the Department of the Environment. We did not consult the Department of National Heritage as it has no locus in this matter.

The financial savings involved in establishing the new range, as opposed to continuing to use the current site at Lulworth, are difficult to quantify precisely. We expect, however, that the saving in man hours and fuel alone could be as much as £500,000 per annum. Also, were the task not transferred to the new range, there would be significant operational penalties elsewhere in the Navy's programme as a result of the greater amount of resources necessary to complete the NGS task.

After a preliminary survey of the whole coast area from Lizard to Start Point, we have also given careful consideration to several alternative sites to that proposed off Dodman. These included Bolt Head, Bolt Tail, HMS Cambridge, Rame Head and the Eddystone Lighthouse. Each of these sites proved unsuitable, however, for various reasons.

There has been local concern about the potential impact of this proposal on the local economy. As it is the Navy's intention to work round, rather than to disrupt, the activities of fishing and commercial vessels and of leisure craft, we would expect there to be very little impact on Cornwall's economy.

The formal phase of the public consultation period has now ended, and the various representations are being considered. We shall look very carefully at all the factors before making a final decision.

D-day Veterans

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans Her Majesty's Government have to compile a register of surviving British service men and other United Kingdom citizens who took part in the D-day landings to ascertain their living conditions; and if he will introduce measures to improve those conditions.

Mr. Aitken: It is the Government's aim to provide a full range of health and welfare facilities to meet the needs of all members of the population. This would include those who have served in the Armed Forces, and who may expect to benefit from them in the same way as other members of the community. There are of course also arrangements in place to cater for the special needs of former members of the armed services.

D-day Commemoration

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost to Her Majesty's Government of the events staged to commemorate D-day.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Redcar (Dr. Mowlam) on 24 May, *Official Report*, column *108*. The estimated additional costs for the Department of National Heritage are approximately £230,000.

Troops (Emergency Tours)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* infantry battalions and Royal Marine Commandos, *(b)* Royal Artillery regiments, *(c)* Royal Armoured Corps regiments and *(d)* Royal Engineer regiments are currently projected to have an emergency tour interval in (i) 1994-95 and (ii) 1995-96 of less than 24 months, assuming continuation of the current level of commitments in Bosnia and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: On current plans the following number of units will deploy in each of the two years on emergency tours within 24 months of their last emergency tour:

	1994-95	*1995-96*
Infantry battalions and Royal Marine commandos	6	7
Royal Artillery regiments	1	1
Royal Armoured Corps regiments	1	2
Engineer squadrons	4	8

Household Division

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of his duty hours *(a)* a guardsman and *(b)* a trooper in the Household Division has spent on

public duties over the most recent (i) quarterly and (ii) annual period for which figures are available; and what assessment he has made of the impact of public duties on recruitment to the Household Division; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: It is not possible to answer the question in the form requested. On average, however, a guardsman in a public duties battalion is committed to nine days public duties per month, rising to 13 days in the ceremonial season and a trooper to 10 days per month, rising to 14 days in the ceremonial season.

There is no evidence to suggest that the Household Division's requirement to perform public duties has any effect on its ability to meet its recruitment targets.

McCarthy and Sons

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds McCarthy and Sons (Contractors) Ltd. of Coombe road, Torquay, are ineligible to work on his Department's sites.

Mr. Aitken: Provided that McCarthy and Sons (Contractors) Ltd. of Coombe road, Torquay meets the MOD's contract terms, including security requirements, there is no reason why the company should not be eligible to undertake work at MOD sites.

Military Bands

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of maintaining and training *(a)* a military bandsman at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, Twickenham, *(b)* a Royal Marine bandsman trained at Deal and *(c)* a Royal Air Force bandsman trained at Uxbridge, including all extraneous training costs; and what is the annual cost of training an Army bandsman at Kneller Hall.

Mr. Hanley: It is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between the costs of training bandsmen at these establishments for various reasons, such as the differences in course lengths and varying standards of musical ability on arrival. It is possible, however, to give a broad indication of the approximate annual cost of training bandsmen at the three establishments in question, and this is as follows:

	£
Deal	72,000
Kneller Hall	16,000
Uxbridge	[1]Nil

[1] The RAF recruits fully trained musicians although there is a small element of expenditure on higher level training.

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sum was spent by his Department on the restoration of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, after the decision to reprieve the RMSM and prior to the visit by Her Majesty the Queen to mark the completion of the restoration.

Mr. Hanley: Repairs to the roof and work on the stonework on the external facade of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, was carried out in November 1990 at a cost of approximately £2,000,000.

Special Air Service

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to disband R Squadron of the Special Air Service.

Mr. Hanley: There are no plans to reduce the current strength of the SAS reserve although some restructuring will be necessary to enable more flexible use of the numbers available.

Small Arms

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the capability to produce small arms nitro compound currently exists in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Aitken: Small arms nitro compound is not a term recognised within the Ministry of Defence. There is no capability in the United Kingdom to produce propellant for small arms ammunition.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 June 1994

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Carpets

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what was the cost to the Palace of Westminster of the new carpet which was put down during the spring recess in the Cloisters offices and other places; why it was necessary to replace the existing carpet; how long it had been there; what was the cost of replacement; what happened to the old carpet; and if he will make a statement on carpet replacement in the Palace of Westminster and on the estate.

Mr. Ray Powell: The programme of planned maintenance and replacement of carpets in the Palace of Westminster is the responsibility of the Director of Works and is determined by their condition and the need to maintain adequate standards of safety. The replacement of the carpet in the Cloisters was two years overdue. Expenditure for the carpet replacement programme is included in the annual and 10-year rolling programmes of works which are considered by the Accommodation and Works Committee and the Finance and Services Committee before being submitted for approval by the Commission.

EDUCATION

Museums Schools Services

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether OFSTED, the Office of Standards in Education, will continue to publish thrice-yearly reports on museums schools services as formerly issued by Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the new independent Office of Standards in Education. I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

Fees and Awards

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether spouses of European Economic Area nationals living and working in the United Kingdom who are not themselves nationals of a member state are entitled to home fee status under the provisions of the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1983.

Mr. Boswell: No. The regulations do, however, extend home fees status to EC nationals and EEA migrant workers, and the children of both, living in the EEA for three years immediately prior to the start of a course. Dependants of EEA nationals living and working in the United Kingdom, who are not themselves EEA nationals, can qualify for home fee status by a period of three years residence in the United Kingdom immediately prior to the start of a course.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the children of Turkish workers legally employed in the United Kingdom are admitted to courses of general education, apprenticeship and vocational training under the same educational entry qualifications as children of nationals of the European Union member states; and that they benefit from the advantages provided for under national legislation in this area as required by Association Council decision 1180, article 10 of the Turkey/EC association agreement and additional protocol; and that such children are not required to pay overseas student fees.

Mr. Boswell: None. However, the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1983 provide home fee status to anyone, regardless of nationality, attending further and higher education institutions if they have been resident within the United Kingdom for three years immediately prior to the start of the course, other than for the purpose of receiving full-time education. The children of Turkish workers legally employed in the United Kingdom for such a period therefore automatically receive entitlement to home fee status.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which local education authorities have been written to on an individual basis by his Department about the nature and content of information being provided by the local education authority to parents on the question of grant-maintained status.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has written within the last 20 months to the following local education authorities about the nature and content of information that they have circulated to parents and governors on the question of grant-maintained status:

Avon
Barnet
Berkshire
Birmingham
Bolton
Bradford
Cleveland
Cornwall
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Durham
East Sussex
Essex
Hammersmith and Fulham
Havering
Humberside
Kent
Knowsley
Lambeth
Lancashire
Leicestershire
Lewisham
Liverpool
Merton
Newcastle
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
North Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire
Salford
Sheffield
Somerset
Staffordshire
Surrey
Wiltshire
Wirral

Several have been written to on more than one occasion.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many ballots for grant-maintained status, and in respect of which schools, have been declared void as a consequence of misleading information being circulated to parents.

Mr. Robin Squire: One ballot for grant-maintained status has been declared void on the grounds that voting in

the ballot is likely to have been influenced to a significant extent by misleading information. The school in question is Christ Church middle school in Staffordshire.

Ballots may be voided on these grounds under section 31 of the Education Act 1993, which came into effect for ballots initiated on or after 1 January 1994.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the outcome of the complaints about his Department's advertising campaign on grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Patten: The Advertising Standards Authority last week published its conclusions that these advertisements were not misleading and that they in no way breached the authority's code of practice.

I understand that the Comptroller and Auditor General has also examined the advertising as part of his normal audit and found that the Department had followed all the established conventions about Government publicity, that Ministers had agreed the detailed content of the advertisements and that they had been properly briefed on the conventions.

The Department's campaign has therefore now been given a clean bill of health on all counts.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Addiction

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were identified as drug addicts in each year since 1979, by drug of addiction.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1988 to 1992 on children notified as drug addicts is in the table. Information for 1987 is not readily available and information for earlier years is not available on a comparable basis.

All drug addicts aged under 21 notified to the Home Office during the year by type of drug to which addiction was reported[1] and year
United Kingdom — *Number of persons*

Type of drug	1988 Age group Under 16	16	17	18-20	Total under 21
Heroin	10	52	152	1,214	1,428
Methadone	0	3	8	113	124
Dipipanone	0	1	2	29	32
Cocaine	0	4	19	103	126
Morphine	0	2	3	44	49
Pethidine	0	0	0	4	4
Dextromoramide	0	0	2	13	15
Levorphanol	0	0	0	0	0
Hydrocodone	0	0	0	0	0
Oxycodone	0	0	0	0	0
Phenazocine	0	0	0	0	0
Piritramide	0	0	0	0	0
Hydromorphone	0	0	0	0	0
Opium	0	0	0	2	2
All addicts	10	56	169	1,312	1,547
of which notified	0	3	23	458	484

[1] As an addict can be reported as addicted to more than one notifiable drug the figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.
[2] At time of last notification in the year.

All drug addicts aged under 21 notified to the Home Office during the year by type of drug to which addiction was reported[1] and year
United Kingdom — *Number of persons*

Type of drug	1989 Age group Under 16	16	17	18-20	Total under 21
Heroin	9	32	119	1,153	1,313
Methadone	1	4	8	89	102
Dipipanone	0	0	2	25	27
Cocaine	3	4	18	96	121
Morphine	1	0	2	45	48
Pethidine	0	0	0	1	1
Dextromoramide	0	0	0	13	13
Levorphanol	0	0	0	0	0
Hydrocodone	0	0	0	0	0
Oxycodone	0	0	0	0	0
Phenazocine	0	0	0	0	0
Piritramide	0	0	0	0	0
Hydromorphone	0	0	0	0	0
Opium	0	0	0	0	0
All addicts	13	36	135	1,259	1,443
of which; notified	0	6	24	431	461

[1] As an addict can be reported as addicted to more than one notifiable drug the figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.
[2] At time of last notification in the year.

All drug addicts aged under 21 notified to the Home Office during the year by type of drug to which addiction was reported[1] and year
United Kingdom — *Number of persons*

Type of drug	1990 Age group Under 16	16	17	18-20	Total under 21
Heroin	8	33	133	1,280	1,454
Methadone	2	7	19	250	278
Dipipanone	1	0	1	26	28
Cocaine	2	3	26	148	179
Morphine	0	3	1	31	35
Pethidine	0	0	0	1	1
Dextromoramide	0	0	1	11	12
Levorphanol	0	0	0	0	0
Hydrocodone	0	0	0	0	0
Oxycodone	0	0	0	0	0
Phenazocine	0	0	0	0	0
Piritramide	0	0	0	0	0
Hydromorphone	0	0	0	0	0
Opium	0	0	2	14	16
All addicts	11	39	163	1,482	1,695
of which; notified	1	8	19	489	517

[1] As an addict can be reported as addicted to more than one notifiable drug the figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.
[2] At time of last notification in the year.

All drug addicts aged under 21 notified to the Home Office during the year by type of drug to which addiction was reported[1] and year— continued
United Kingdom — *Number of persons*

Type of drug	1991 Age group Under 16	16	17	18-20	Total under 21
Heroin	13	43	129	1,235	1,420
Methadone	5	7	30	406	448
Dipipanone	0	0	2	30	32

Type of drug	Under 16	16	17	18-20	Total under 21
	1991 Age group				
Cocaine	2	7	13	155	177
Morphine	0	1	4	27	32
Pethidine	0	0	0	4	4
Dextromoramide	0	0	2	7	9
Levorphanol	0	0	0	0	0
Hydrocodone	0	0	0	0	0
Oxycodone	0	0	0	0	0
Phenazocine	0	0	0	0	0
Piritramide	0	0	0	0	0
Hydromorphone	0	0	0	0	0
Opium	0	0	0	1	1
All addicts	16	50	155	1,534	1,755
of which; renotified	3	2	26	499	530

[1] As an addict can be reported as addicted to more than one notifiable drug the figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.
[2] At time of last notification in the year.

All drug addicts aged under 21 notified to the Home Office during the year by type of drug to which addiction was reported[1] and year—continued

United Kingdom *Number of persons*

Type of drug	Under 16	16	17	18-20	Total under 21
	1992 Age group				
Heroin	12	66	174	1,544	1,796
Methadone	2	20	53	501	576
Dipipanone	1	1	5	20	27
Cocaine	1	4	34	187	226
Morphine	0	1	3	14	18
Pethidine	0	0	0	1	1
Dextromoramide	0	0	0	1	1
Levorphanol	0	0	0	0	0
Hydrocodone	0	0	0	0	0
Oxycodone	0	0	0	0	0
Phenazocine	0	0	0	0	0
Piritramide	0	0	0	0	0
Hydromorphone	0	0	0	0	0
Opium	0	0	0	1	1
All addicts	14	82	229	1,900	2,225
of which; renotified	0	5	28	494	527

[1] As an addict can be reported as addicted to more than one notifiable drug the figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.
[2] At time of last notification in the year.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individual general practitioners provided notification of drug addiction in each year since 1979.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), then the Minister of State, Home Office gave her on 12 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *827*. The figure given in that reply, which related to 1991, was obtained during a special study undertaken for another purpose, and information relating to the number of individual general practitioners who have provided notifications for each year since 1979 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total number of individuals notified as drug addicts in each year since 1979, by drug of addiction.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is published in tables 1 and 2 of the following Home Office statistical bulletins—issue 7/90, "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs; Addicts Notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1989", and issue 15/93, "Statistics of Drug Addicts Notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1992". Copies of these publications are in the Library. These provide information on new addicts annually since 1979. Information on renotified addicts is only available from 1987.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of doctors in each year since 1979 who may prescribe diamorphine for drug addiction purposes.

Mr. Maclean: Ninety doctors are currently licensed by the Home Office to prescribe diamorphine for the treatment of drug addiction. Details of the numbers licensed in previous years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many rough sleepers have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* cautioned and *(c)* prosecuted for begging in the Metropolitan police area for each of the last five years, and in 1994 to date.

Mr. Maclean: Information is not collected centrally on the residential status of persons arrested, cautioned and brought before the magistrates courts in England and Wales.

The table shows the number of persons cautioned and prosecuted for offences of begging and sleeping out by area from 1988 to 1992. Data for 1993 onwards are not yet available. Arrests data are not collected centrally for these specific offences.

Number of persons cautioned and prosecuted for offences of begging and sleeping out under the Vagrancy Act 1824 by area 1988 to 1992

Area/Year	Begging		Sleeping out	
	Cautions	Prosecutions	Cautions	Prosecutions
Metropolitan Police District				
1988	156	500	10	12
1989	207	1,251	—	12
1990	297	1,447	1	12
1991	457	1,486	—	5
1992	848	1,029	1	5

Area/Year	Begging		Sleeping out	
	Cautions	Prosecutions	Cautions	Prosecutions
City of London				
1988	—	—	—	—
1989	5	5	—	—
1990	6	3	—	1
1991	9	11	—	—
1992	5	5	—	—
England and Wales				
1988	164	573	13	17
1989	220	1,402	—	24
1990	325	1,640	4	29
1991	540	1,839	8	20
1992	1,016	1,425	2	14

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are given to the Metropolitan police for dealing with beggars; what changes he has made to them recently; and what proposals he has for changing them.

Mr. Maclean: None. This is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Maclean: As a measure of protective security, staff are instructed to keep the perimeters of buildings clear. No specific instructions are given to the security staff about those sleeping rough or begging. No problems have been experienced in either category within the past three months.

Firearms

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes involving guns there have been in each year since and including 1979.

Mr. Maclean: Figures of notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", copies of which can be found in the Library—lastest edition, 1992, Cm 2410, table 3.1. Figures for 1993 are not yet available.

Police Staffing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding his plans to make chief constables responsible for their own establishments; if he will continue to give substantive answers to questions from hon. Members regarding police staffing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The representations which we have received about the proposed changes to the police funding system have favoured dispensing with central controls on police force establishments.

One of the changes, which is proposed by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill, is that the Home Secretary will no longer be responsible for approving police force establishment. The present system of detailed monthly returns will, therefore, no longer be needed for that purpose. Consequently, I propose to discontinue that requirement on police forces as from April 1995.

Certain items of information will be needed for financial planning purposes, and we are at present considering the minimum level of data which will be sought from forces. This is unlikely to be asked for more frequently than twice a year.

Under the proposed new arrangements, the number and mix of staff in police forces will be the responsibility of local police authorities. Home Office Ministers will continue to give substantive replies to questions from hon. Members about staffing numbers based on the latest available data.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* serving police officers, *(b)* civilian staff assisting the police and *(c)* crimes there were in the latest available three years for each police authority in Wales, for Wales as a whole and for England; and what was the ratio of crimes to police officers in each case.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is in the table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the police and police and civilian strength

Police force area	Serving police officers	Civilian staff	Recorded offences	Offences per police officer
1991				
Dyfed-Powys	944	270·0	25,970	28
Gwent	995	332·0	38,673	39
North Wales	1,343	476·0	44,418	33
South Wales	3,142	1,162·0	161,977	52
Wales	6,424	2,240·0	271,038	42
England	118,642	49,714·0	5,005,135	42
1992				
Dyfed-Powys	960	292·0	28,539	30
Gwent	1,000	347·0	40,961	41
North Wales	1,356	505·0	49,204	36
South Wales	3,164	1,194·0	168,554	53
Wales	6,480	2,338·0	287,258	44
England	119,399	51,898·0	5,304,459	44
1993				
Dyfed-Powys	966	303·0	24,743	26
Gwent	989	348·5	400,008	40
North Wales	1,341	511·5	48,102	36
South Wales	3,142	1,286·5	166,165	53
Wales	6,438	2,449·5	279,018	43
England	119,100	52,722·5	5,251,340	44

Criminal Justice

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will publish the 1993 report on race and the criminal justice system under the Criminal Justice Act 1991;

(2) when he will publish the 1993 report on costs of the criminal justice system under the Criminal Justice Act 1991;

(3) when he will publish the 1993 report on gender and the criminal justice system under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend's responsibility under section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 is in each year to publish information as he considers expedient to assist persons engaged in the administration of criminal justice to avoid discrimination—whether on the basis of race, gender or any other improper grounds—and to enable them to be aware of the financial implications of their decisions. Information about race and gender issues was published in 1992, and information on costs in 1993. This year we have published a paper on gender; and a larger publication dealing with race will be published in July.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department is doing to ensure that its treatment of asylum seekers does not breach article 5 of the European convention on human rights and article 9 of the international covenant on civil and political rights.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I am satisfied that the proper detention of people in accordance with the Immigration Act 1971 does not breach the United Kingdom's obligations under those articles.

Special Police Protection

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reviewing the funding arrangements for police protection of special households; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The introduction of cash limits on police funding from April 1995 will necessitate the use of a new formula for allocating funding to police forces. This formula is currently under construction. Special account will need to be taken, within the formula, of security issues, including the need to protect special households. The enactment of clause 15 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill will ensure that no payments will be made under the new arrangements until Parliament has approved a report setting out the considerations behind the grant allocation.

Betting and Gaming

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to relax the present advertising restrictions for bingo halls to allow advertising *(a)* in newspapers, *(b)* on the radio, *(c)* on television, *(d)* on bill boards and *(e)* through local signage, other than that presently permitted to a certain distance from the halls themselves;

(2) what plans he has to abolish the requirement for 24-hour advance membership of bingo halls.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that these matters are the subject of discussions between the Bingo Association of Great Britain and the Gaming Board for Great Britain. I will await the outcome of those discussions before considering proposals for relaxation of the restrictions.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will bring forward proposals to allow payment of prizes up to the current £6 limit from amusement-with-prizes machines to be made in cash, rather than replayable tokens, in England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This matter is under review.

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to relax the restrictions on siting amusement-with-prizes machines in betting shops, pubs, casinos and private clubs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are reviewing current policy on siting of amusement-with-prizes machines in betting shops. The outcome of the review will be made known once a decision is reached. Changes to primary legislation would be required.

These machines are already sited widely in public houses and other premises. Casinos and members' clubs are eligible for two jackpot gaming machines.

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the suitability of the present £6 limit for amusement-with-prizes machines in relation to the level of prize payments from society lottery scratch cards; and what plans he has to increase the pay-out limit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Amusement-with-prizes machines are intended to provide amusement as opposed to a form of gambling for significant amounts of money and are not analogous to society lottery scratch cards. The limits for machines are, however, kept under review.

Parking Enforcement

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Metropolitan police have taken to ensure that there will be a single telephone number for inquiries regarding clamped or towed-away cars after the contract for this service expires in September 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that the Metropolitan police and the Parking Committee for London, which acts as a co-ordinating body for the new parking enforcement work of the London boroughs, have discussed the unification of the boroughs' computerised public inquiry service, dealing with vehicle removals and clamping, and the similar inquiry service provided by the police.

It is expected that a single system, with one inquiry point for motorists whose vehicles have been clamped or removed in London, will be provided by October 1994. Meanwhile, from 4 July 1994, arrangements involving the exchange of computer terminals will make it possible for the inquiry centre which is telephoned first to provide a full service to all callers.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to the Metropolitan police for the protection of General Pinochet during his recent visit; and if he will call for reports from other police forces.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 17 March, *Official Report*, column *781*.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what immigration procedures were adopted in respect of the recent visit to Britain of General Pinochet.

Mr. Charles Wardle: General Pinochet was admitted to the United Kingdom as a visitor in accordance with the immigration rules.

Terrorism

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *909-18*, if he will list the incidents of terrorist activity in Great Britain since 4 November attributable to groups *(a)* connected with Northern Ireland and *(b)* not connected with Northern Ireland.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As previously, the list classifies acts of terrorism according to the definitions in section 14(2) of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Date	*Location*	
(a) Connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland		
14 December 1993	Railway line near Woking station	Small device exploded on railway line. Slight damage to line. No injuries.
16 December 1993	Railway line near Brookwood and Farnborough stations	Two devices discovered. Disrupted by controlled explosion.
20 December 1993	King Edward Buildings, Sorting Office, London, EC1	Postal device discovered. Made safe. No damage no injuries
	Travellers Tavern, Elizabeth Street, Victoria, London, SW1	Six devices discovered in a holdall. No injuries. At least one ignited. Minor damage.
	Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, Rosebury Avenue, London, EC1	Package ignited. No injuries. Minor damage.
	Northfields Tube Station, Ealing, London, W13	Small device ignited in a litter bin. No significant damage. No injuries.
27 January 1994	C&A, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage.
	Mothercare, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage.
	Silverdale Travel Goods, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited; some damage.
28 January 1994	C&A, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage.
	Mothercare, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device made safe.
29 January 1994	Nightingales, Oxford Street, London, W1	One incendiary device ignited and another made safe; little damage.
18 February 1994	Record shop, 157 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2	Incendiary device discovered and made safe.
19 February 1994	Record Shop, 157 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2	Very small high explosive device exploded; minor damage. Incendiary device made safe on previous day.
	Top Shop, Oxford Circus, London, W1	Two incendiary devices ignited; little damage.
	Hennes, Oxford Circus, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage.
	Newsagents, Great Cumberland Place, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited destroying shop.
	Burtons, New Oxford Street, London, WC1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage.
	Burtons, Regent Street, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited and very small HE device detonated; little damage.
	Liberty's, Regent Street, London W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage.
	Mister Byrite, Oxford Circus, London, W1	Incendiary device made safe.
22 February 1994	Mr. Handy, Edgware Road, London, W2	Incendiary device made safe (left over from above series).
9 March 1994	Heathrow Airport, London	Four mortars launched from a car parked at the Excelsior Hotel, landing on or near the northern runway. None exploded and there was no damage.

Date	Location	
11 March 1994	Heathrow Airport, London	Four mortars launched from waste ground, landing on an aircraft parking area near Terminal Four. None exploded and there was no damage.
13 March 1994	Heathrow Airport, London	Five mortars launched from waste ground, landing in the vicinity of Terminal Four. None exploded and there was no damage.
15 March 1994	Railway line near Sevenoaks, Kent	Explosive device discovered. Believed to be left over from the series of attacks in December but had failed to detonate.
21 March 1994	Railway line, Orpington, Kent	Timer of explosive device discovered. Believed to be left over from series of attacks in December but had failed to detonate.
12 May 1994	MGM cinema, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device found. Device had malfunctioned and is believed to have been one of a series of devices planted in West End cinemas in 1991.
6 June 1994	Sevenoaks railway station, Kent	Device made safe in controlled explosion.
10 June 1994	Liberty's, Oxford Street, London, W1	Two incendiary devices discovered and made safe.
11 June 1994	Mr. Byrite's, Oxford Street, London, W1	Incendiary device ignited causing little damage. A further device had failed to detonate.
13 June 1994	Railway line, one mile from Stevenage station	Device exploded on embankment by railway line. Little damage.
(b) Other acts of terrorism		
4 November 1993	Turkish Embassy, Belgrave Square, London	Petrol bombs thrown. Minor damage. No injuries.
	Turkish Airlines Office, London	Petrol bombs thrown. No injuries.
	London Islamic Turkish Association Centre, London, N16	Petrol bombs thrown. Extensive fire damage. No injuries.
	British Telecom Office (wrongly identified as T C Ziraat Bank), London, EC2	Bricks and petrol bombs thrown. Minor injuries to five BT employees.
	Sabanci Turkish Bank, London, EC2	Petrol bomb thrown. Minor damage. Member of public injured.

Rural Crime

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received on the number of volunteer foot patrols, backed by local police forces, which are operating in response to the increase in rural crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Following my announcement at the national neighbourhood watch conference in December, there has been considerable interest in the idea of volunteer foot patrols. Helpful discussions have been taking place with the police on this matter. It is essential that any patrolling should be supported by the local police and carefully monitored. Some examples of good practice already exist for voluntary patrolling. In respect of rural crime prevention, I have been delighted with the enthusiasm with which both police and public have greeted the parish constables initiative. There are now more than 60 schemes in operation around the country.

Epilepsy

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines or instructions currently exist for the treatment and medical care of prisoners with epilepsy.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 21 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the guidelines or instructions which currently exist for the treatment and medical care of prisoners with epilepsy.

At reception every prisoner is asked if they suffer from fits or epilepsy. If they do, enquiries are made about the nature of the treatment they are receiving. Further investigation may be required to see whether there is supportive evidence, as found in an electroencephalogram, or whether other conditions which can mimic epilepsy can be excluded from the diagnosis.

The prison doctor would then decide whether working conditions which could prove dangerous to a epilepsy sufferer,

such as working with machinery at heights or driving, should preclude a sufferer from working in these conditions. Medical instructions are issued accordingly.

The training of all doctors and nurses includes the treatment and management of epilepsy. The induction training of all prison officers, includes training specifically aimed at the recognition of the symptoms of an epileptic episode, together with training in the appropriate first aid response.

In our plans for continuing medical education of prison health care staff, the management of epilepsy is to be given high priority.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have died as a result of epilepsy in each prison service establishment in each year since 1984.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 21 June 1994:

The Home Secretary had asked me to reply to your recent Question about the numbers of prisoners who have died as a result of epilepsy in each Prison Service establishment in each year since 1984.

The attached table gives details of the number of those prisoners whose death has been medically attributed to epilepsy or effects related to that medical condition. The most recent death in custody which was certified to be epilepsy-related occurred in 1992.

Establishment	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Birmingham	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Brixton	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coldingley	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Kingston	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Maidstone	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Parkhurst	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stafford	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Wandsworth	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Prisoners

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners were held in establishments where prisoners were unlocked for a total of at least 12 hours on weekdays, on the last day of each month since April 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 14 June 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 21 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about what percentage of prisoners are held in establishments where prisoners were unlocked for a total of at least 12 hours on weekdays on the last day of each month since April 1992.

This information has only been collected since June 1993. The available information is as follows:

Month	*Percentage of prisoners held in establishments where prisoners were unlocked for 12 hours or more on weekdays Per cent.*
1993	
June	22
July	22
August	23
September	23
October	23
November	24
December	24
1994	
January	26
February	27
March	29
April	31
May	32

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of hours per week which prisoners spend in purposeful activity, at the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 14 June 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 21 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average number of hours per week which prisoners spend in purposeful activity, at the latest available date.

In May 1994, prisoners spent an average of 26·06 hours per week in purposeful activity.

Prison Catering

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of the facility provided by ARA caterers in each of the prisons where they are operating; and what are the comparable costs of catering provided by public employees compared with contractors.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 26 May 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 21 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of the facility provided by ARA caterers in each of the prisons where they are operating and about the comparable costs of catering provided by public employees compared with contractors.

ARA provide a contracted catering service at Woodhill and Bullingdon. The costs of these contracts are not disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality. Group 4, who subcontract to ARA, provide a service at Wolds Remand Prison, the cost of which is included in the operating fee payable to the contractor.

The average costs of contractors to provide catering in the eight establishments (apart from Wolds) where catering is contracted out is £552 per inmate place per year. Costs are not available on a comparable basis for establishments where the service is provided by public employees, that is, prison officers and/or civilians, but the average *staff* cost in such establishments is £369 per inmate place per year. This excludes all overhead costs, at establishment and national level, including administration, supply and training. These costs do not include food, for which both contractors and public sector caterers are given the same minimum allowance.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Parks

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what restrictions on the use and unfurling of banners in Hyde park have been imposed in respect of the March for Jesus on 25 June; and for what reasons.

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 15 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your question about what restrictions have been imposed on the use and unfurling of banners at the March for Jesus in Hyde Park on 25 June.

We have asked the organisers that the majority of banners are furled on entering the Park and placards are deposited at convenient points, to be collected by their owners at the end of the event. The organisers have agreed, as they did on each of the previous occasions they have used the Park.

This is a standard condition that applies to all rallies and other assemblies in the Royal Parks including, for instance, the miners' rally in Hyde Park in October 1992. It is intended to reduce the risk to those taking part from large numbers of often quite excited people waving wooden poles around. It also prevents a lot of litter, as most placards are rather flimsy and are abandoned in the park at the end of the rally.

We have agreed that that they may display a selection of international flags at the entrance to the Park. We have allowed them to bring the main banner with the title of the rally into the Park, and also individual church or geographical banners to help people identify the location of their group.

Naval Firing Range, Dodman Point

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether his Department has been consulted by the Ministry of Defence over the possible siting of a naval firing range off Dodman point in Cornwall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* My Department has not been consulted on this matter. I know, however, that, in making his decision, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will take into account the possible implications for the local tourism and leisure sectors upon which the Cornwall economy so much depends.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Illegal Radio Operators

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the fees charged to short-wave radio users for detection of sources of interference from illegal radio operators, total revenue from such fees in the most recent convenient year, and the extent to which such fees cover the cost of such detection.

Mr. Heseltine: No separate fee is charged for the detection of illegal radio operation. The cost of this work is covered in the licence fees charged to licensed users. Details of current licence fees for all categories of licensed users are in the Wireless Telegraphy (Licence Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 1994, No. 659, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Telecommunications

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council on 30 May.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Council confirmed in principle the common position on the draft open network provision —ONP—voice telephony directive that it had adopted on 30 June 1993, following the failure of the conciliation procedure with the European Parliament, adopting none of the amendments to the common position proposed by the European Parliament. There was no general agreement on the two proposed decisions on trans-European networks for integrated services digital networks—TEN-ISDN—which will be considered further by the Committee of Permanent Representatives—COREPER. The Council adopted conclusions on the Commission's fourth annual report on the implementation of Euro-ISDN and a resolution on the co-ordination of activity on interchange of data between Administrations—IDA. A number of problems remained unresolved on the proposed decision on IDA, particularly on costs, finance, the list of projects and the committee structure. The decision was referred back to COREPER for further discussion.

Commissioner Bangemann reported orally on the work of his group of "prominent persons" on information infrastructure. The report of the group will be published shortly and will emphasise the importance of increased competition in telecommunications as well as the need for market-led investment from private sources, rather than new Community funding. The report will be presented to the European Council in Corfu on 24-26 June, possibly with specific recommendations from the Commission.

The Council agreed conclusions setting out the next steps on standards for advanced television and invited the Commission to draft an article on conditional access for pay television to be included in a draft directive on standards. The text of a draft Council resolution on development of digital broadcasting was agreed. The Commission made brief presentations on the Green Paper on mobile and personal communications and the draft

directives on mutual recognition of telecommunications and satellite licences. There was a short debate on postal services; the Commission noted that further work was needed on the development of a European terminal dues system which should ideally be completed in advance of the forthcoming Universal Postal Union conference in Seoul in the autumn. The Commission undertook to use its good offices to assist in this process and also reaffirmed its commitment to produce proposals on universal service, reserved services and technical standards in line with the February 1994 Council resolution.

No formal votes were taken at the Council.

Coal Industry

Mr. Duncan-Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made in establishing the Coal Authority.

Mr. Eggar: I intend to appoint Sir David White as chairman of the Coal Authority, subject to Parliament's enacting the Coal Industry Bill. In the meantime, Sir David will advise my Department on the establishment of the authority and its policy. Sir David will give up his current appointment as a part-time member of British Coal.

The Government gave a commitment in their coal review White Paper that the headquarters of the Coal Authority would be located in Nottinghamshire. I am now able to announce the initial accommodation arrangements being made for the authority pending its own consideration of longer-term arrangements. The authority's headquarters will be located at 200 Lichfield lane, Berry Hill, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, which British Coal Opencast will also continue to use for the time being. The Authority will additionally take over British Coal's abandoned mine plans facility at Bretby in Staffordshire, and co-locate certain associated functions.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had on the future of the Coal Research Establishment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The future of the Coal Research Establishment is a matter for British Coal.

British Coal announced on 15 June that a new company, CRE Group Ltd., comprising CRE's technical and consultancy services together with CRE's laboratory-scale research and development activities, will be offered for sale later in the year. CRE's large-scale R and D activities will be retained within British Coal.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings, hospitality or protection was offered to General Pinochet during his recent visit to Britain.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department offered no meetings, hospitality or protection.

Fire Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what consultations he has had with *(a)* his colleagues in other Government Departments, *(b)* the fire service and *(c)* the Fire Brigades Union on the scrutiny report on the fire service; and when he intends to make an announcement regarding the report;

(2) what decisions he has made regarding the scrutiny report on the deregulation of the fire service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The fire safety review team has completed its work and its report has been submitted to the Government. Ministers are now considering the report and the question of its publication. No decisions have been taken on it, nor have any consultations begun with interested parties outside Government. But the Government have made it consistently clear that they are committed to full consultation with interested parties before any changes in the existing arrangements are made.

Lloyd's

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will seek to amend the Lloyd's Act 1982 so that members of Lloyd's have a right to sue the committee of Lloyd's.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no plans to do so.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the commitments to restrict trade in toxic wastes made under the Basle convention will be allowable under the Uruguay round world trade accords.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom's ability to discharge its obligations under the Basle convention will not be affected by the results of the Uruguay round.

Metric Conversion

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what timetable exists for the completion of metric conversion;

(2) when the exercise on *(a)* metric conversion and *(b)* metric conversion with regard to distance measurement is expected to be completed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government intend to bring forward legislation to implement the units of measurement directive before the summer recess. This legislation will include dates for converting to metric where conversion is required. However, it will allow the continued use of the mile, yard, foot and inch for road traffic signs, distance and speed measurement as permitted by the directive.

Post Office

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action will be taken in any change of status of the Post Office to protect the current facility for posting articles for the blind.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government are well aware of the importance of the free postage facility currently offered by the Royal Mail for articles for the blind. The Green Paper on the Post Office, which is due to be published shortly, will, therefore, make it clear that, under any option, the Royal Mail will be required to continue to offer this valued service.

Tour Operators

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase the regulations of tour operator companies in order to protect the finances and holidays of their customers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* I have no such plans. Customer pre-payments for package holidays are already protected by the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992.

EMPLOYMENT

Voluntary Unemployment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the London area are currently considered by the Government to be voluntarily unemployed; and by how much this figure has increased over the last 15 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No problems have been reported with either category in the past three months.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's policy regarding the eligibility of disabled people to become members of industrial tribunals; what records are kept of the number of disabled people who are members of industrial tribunals; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We welcome applications for appointment from all sections of the community, including disabled people, and the information published by the Department on the appointment arrangements makes this clear. Records are not kept of the numbers of lay members who are disabled.

PRIME MINISTER

Developing Nations

Q8. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the assistance that his Government provide to developing nations.

The Prime Minister: With the sixth largest aid programme, we make a substantial contribution to the international effort to promote sustainable economic and social development in developing countries.

MI6 (Cleaners)

Ms Harman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about cleaners working at MI6.

The Prime Minister: The contract which has been let for office cleaning services at the new security intelligence service headquarters at Vauxhall cross provides for a more flexible service at a substantial saving to public funds. I regret that staff have had to be made redundant, but the procedures followed were fair and complied fully with the requirements of both domestic and European employment legislation. The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations do not apply in this case.

Special Advisers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria are used to assess how many special advisers are attached to each Government Department; what are the criteria of evaluation which are applied when determining appropriate grades and salaries; how these posts are advertised; what interviewing and staff selection procedures are applied in choosing the most suitable candidate for each post; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Special adviser appointments are made personally by Ministers, subject to my approval. There is normally a limit of one political adviser for each Cabinet Minister. There is no formal limit on the numbers of expert special advisers, which are subject to need. Salaries are negotiated individually in relation to the special adviser's previous earnings, and are confidential. Selection procedures are a matter for the appointing Minister.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was his estimated annual cost in 1992-93 for work by his Office in preparation for Prime Minister's Question Time.

The Prime Minister: It is not feasible to separate fully the costs involved.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how many written questions were answered by his Office in each of the last three years; and what was the average cost per question.

The Prime Minister: Since I became Prime Minister I have answered more than 2,500 written questions. It is not feasible to separate fully the costs involved.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 19 May, *Official Report,* column 956, what is his estimate of the timing of the ending of the criminal investigation over Lockerbie.

The Prime Minister: The timing of the end of the criminal investigation would be a matter for my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, but the investigation will naturally remain open while the arrest warrants for those accused of the bombing remain in force.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the validity of the alleged claim made in a trial in Beirut concerning the assassination of a Jordanian diplomat by Youssef Chaabane that he blew up Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie.

The Prime Minister: We remain in contact with the Lebanese authorities on this matter. Our present understanding is that Chaabane mentioned the destruction of Pan Am 103 only in claiming that, in the face of

interrogation to which he had been subjected on other charges, he would have been willing to confess to anything, even the Lockerbie bombing.

Job Seeker's Allowance

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Prime Minister, if further details are available about the job seeker's allowance announced in the Budget statement of 30 November by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Prime Minister: Full details of the Government's proposals for job seeker's allowance will be set out in a White Paper to be presented jointly by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Employment and the Secretary of State for Social Security in the autumn. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, the new allowance will be introduced in April 1996.

Job seeker's allowance will be delivered from jobcentres of the Employment Service of the Employment Department.

Employment Service staff will be responsible for advice and help on getting back to work and for the application of labour market tests such as availability for work. Financial aspects of the benefit, including calculation and payment, will be the responsibility of staff of the Benefits Agency of the Department of Social Security, located so far as possible in the same offices.

These arrangements will provide a comprehensive approach to getting unemployed people back to work including a full range of advice on employment and training and on the range of benefits available to those in work. This will be a significant step towards one-stop delivery of services to people seeking work.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Income Support

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many decisions, disallowances and warning letters were issued in respect of actively seeking employment since April 1990; how many income support and unemployment benefit claimants have (i) successfully and (ii) unsuccessfully claimed income support under the hardship rules, showing those whose claim was in doubt due to *(a)* not actively seeking work, *(b)* refusing suitable employment and *(c)* availability for work; and if he will make a statement about the introduction of the job-seeker's allowance in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The information which is available shows that, from September 1991 to April 1994, 44 adjudication officer decisions were made on actively seeking work. Information about the numbers of disallowances or warning letters for not actively seeking work and claims to income support under the hardship rules is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has announced plans to replace unemployment benefit and income support for unemployed people with a new job-seeker's allowance in Great Britain in April 1996. The new benefit will be introduced in Northern Ireland according to the same timetable.

Civil Servants (Outside Appointments)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many job offers were reported by staff in his Department under the requirements of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments in each of the last 10 years by *(a)* staff of grade 3 and above, *(b)* staff below grade 3, *(c)* staff in sections concerned with procurement or contract work, under section 15 of the rules of 1 February 1993 and *(d)* staff in other sections, under section 14; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Sir John Wheeler: The number of job offers reported by the staff of the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments under the requirements of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments in each of the last 10 years in categories *(a)—(d)* is as follows:

	Number
(a) 1988	2
1991	1
1992	1
(b) 1986	1
1989	2
1991	2
1993	1
(c) Nil	
(d) Nil	

All these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leukosis.

Mr. Ancram: None. Enzootic bovine leukosis has never been recorded in Northern Ireland.

Union Flag (Public Buildings)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) whether a flag pole has been provided at the college of further education in Armagh city; whether a Union flag has been supplied to these premises; whether the college board of governors has been given advice about the recognised days on which the Union flag is to be flown at public buildings; why the Union flag was not flown at these premises on the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether a flag pole has been provided at the library of the Southern area education board at Market house, English street, Armagh city; whether a Union flag has been supplied to these premises; whether advice has been given about the recognised days on which the Union flag is flown at public buildings; why the Union flag was not flown on the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen at these premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: A flag-pole and Union flag have been provided at Armagh college of further education and at the library of the Southern area education board at Market house, English street, Armagh. The requirement to fly the Union flag, on prescribed dates, applies to central Government buildings only.

Community Work Forces

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) at what locations in the Strangford constituency there are community work forces; within what district each of these work forces operates; how many trainees each of these work forces is authorised to employ; what is the estimated contribution of public funds in the present financial year to each of these community work forces; and if he will make a statement about the prospects of the community work force network in Strangford constituency;

(2) if he will list the names and locations of each community work force in Northern Ireland, together with the number of trainees authorised for each of these work forces.

Mr. Tim Smith: Responsibility for the subject matter in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 20 June 1994:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS NOS. 966 AND 967: 16 JUNE 1994

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your questions about Community Workforces in Northern Ireland and within your constituency of Strangford. I have taken your questions to refer to Community workshops which are involved in the delivery of the Youth Training Programme.

I have attached a list of the names and addresses of all Community Workshops in Northern Ireland along with their current level of occupancy. The Agency does not set an upper limit in regard to the number of trainees. The limit is determined only by the numbers of trainees the workshop can recruit and its capacity to teach them in accordance with the requirements of the programme.

There is one Community Workshop within your constituency:

Name	*Location*	*Current Occupancy*
North Down Training Organisation	Balloo Avenue, Bangor	72

You also requested details of the estimated contribution of public funds in the present financial year. However, as North Down Training Organisation operates as an independent concern under a Contract of Service with the Training and Employment Agency, I am unable to disclose the financial information requested because I am advised that do so would be a breach of confidence.

As regards future prospects, the Agency, subject to the necessary approvals, hopes to introduce an integrated training programme in 1995 to deliver both Youth and Adult training. It would be open to all interested training organisations to bid for contracts under the proposed new Jobskills programme.

I hope that you find this helpful.

YTP Community Workshops in Northern Ireland

Community workshops Name address and telephone number	*Current occupancy*
BELFAST REGION	
Belfast Central Training Ltd. 121 Donegall Street Belfast, BT1 2FJ Telephone: 324973	74
Chatham House Training & Development Agency Chatham House 28-30 Library Street Belfast, BT1 2JB Telephone: 238520	75
Colinbrook Training Organisation Pembroke Loop Road Poleglass Dunmurry, BT7 0QL Telephone: 625551/2	52
Crumlin Road Opportunities Ltd. Ewarts Industrial Estate Crumlin Road Belfast, BT14 7EA Telephone: 753798/755984	58
East Side Training Ltd. Linenhall Works 174 Castlereagh Road Belfast, BT5 5GX Telephone: 450868	53
Glenand Training Agency Kennedy Way Industrial Estate Blackstaff Road Belfast, BT11 9DT Telephone: 301483	66
Key-Tec Training Services Ltd. Brookfield Industrial Estate 983 Crumlin Road Belfast, BT14 7EA Telephone: 751293	52
Limestone Youth Training Project Jennymount Industrial Estate North Derby Street Belfast, BT15 3HN Telephone: 756658	22
Loughview Training Services Old Church Road Newtownabbey, BT36 7LU Telephone: 866576	101
Quest ITEC Howard House Brunswick Street Belfast, BT2 7GE Telephone: 238009	135
Scala Community Workshop 129 Springfield Road Belfast, BT12 7AF Telephone: 246262/245520	69
Shankill Community Projects Brown Square Paters Hill Belfast, BT13 2GP Telephone: 329931	56
Ulidia Training Services 276-280 Newtownards Road Belfast, BT4 1HE Telephone: 731030	79
Workforce Training Services Peter Pan Complex 90-120 Springfield Road Belfast, BT12 7AJ Telephone: 247016	130
SOUTH EAST REGION	
Clanrye Employment & Training Services The Abbey Abbey Yard Newry, BT34 2EG Telephone: (0693) 67121	3
North Down Training Organisation 12 Balloo Avenue Bangor, BT18 2QT Telephone: (0247) 270945	72
Orchard Training Services Ltd. 63A Park Road Portadown BT62 1DS Telephone: (0762) 331573	64
Southern Group Enterprises Unit 22 Greenbank Industrial Estate Warrenpoint Road Newry, BT34 2PF Telephone: (0693) 66924/66925	2
WESTERN REGION	
Cookstown Community Training Services Ltd. 45A James Street Cookstown, BT80 8AA Telephone: (06487) 61145	38

Community workshops *Name address and telephone number*	*Current occupancy*
CTS Ltd. 51 Dungannon Road Coalisland, BT71 4HP Telephone: (08687) 48512	52
Derry Youth & Community Workshop 6 Society Street Londonderry, BT46 6PJ Telephone: (0504) 268891	63
Erne Youth & Community Workshop Ltd. Tempo Road Enniskillen, BT74 6HR Telephone: (0365) 26916	65
Maydown ITEC c/o Maydown YTP Waterside Londonderry Telephone: (0504) 311005	32
Maydown Youth Training Project Ebrington Business Centre Ebrington Gardens Waterside Londonderry, BT47 1AA Telephone: (0504) 311005	71
Omagh Youth & Community Workshop 1 Castle Street Omagh, BT78 1DD Telephone: (0662) 246535	34
Shantallow Training Services 118-119 Duncreggan Road Pennyburn Pass Londonderry, BT48 0AB Telephone: (0504) 269810	63
Strabane Training Services Ltd. Ballycolman Industrial Estate Strabane, BT62 9AQ Telephone: (0504) 382435/382568	66
North East Region	
Antrim Placement & Training Services Enkalon Business Centre 25 Randalstown Road Antrim, BT41 4LD Telephone: (08494) 60932	43
Bann Area Training Services Ltd. 1 Beresford Place Coleraine, BT52 1HB Telephone: (0265) 52984/53764	130
B C W Training Ltd. Unit 18 Leyland Industrial Estate Ballycastle, BT54 6EZ Telephone: (02657) 62902	21
Seven Towers Training Services Ltd. 2-4 Railway Street Ballymena, BT42 2AB Telephone: (0256) 44003	6

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Home Bank (Dredging)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his consultations in relation to sand dredging from Home bank off the Norfolk coast.

Mr. Jack: I am aware of no such location. In relation to the National Rivers Authority's application to remove sand from the Race bank, discussions have taken place with local fishermen and their representatives. Our position was stated on 20 May in response to the hon. Member for Glandford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), *Official Report*, col. *609*.

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leukosis.

Mr. Soames: As at 15 June 1994 the number of cattle under 30 months of age which were confirmed as reacting positively to the test for enzootic bovine leukosis in England was three. All were from the same herd.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle born after July 1988 were reported by farmers to the MAFF veterinary officers as having BSE; and what percentage were accepted by them as possible BSE cases in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Soames: Information about the age of cattle which are reported to the Ministry as suspect BSE cases, but which are not placed under movement restrictions after being examined by Ministry veterinary officers, is not held centrally. The information requested could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In 1992 and 1993, 2,756 and 8,393 cattle born after 18 July 1988 were placed under movement restrictions, and of these 1,574 and 6,337 were subsequently confirmed by laboratory examination as suffering from BSE. The figures for the two years are not directly comparable, that the number of cattle in the population which were born after 18 July 1988 was greater in 1993 than in 1992.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what EU countries other than the United Kingdom BSE has been found in cattle.

Mr. Soames: France, Denmark, Germany, Republic of Ireland, and Portugal have reported one or more cases of BSE.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amount of money was paid to farmers as compensation for cases of BSE in cattle in each year from 1988; and what amount has been paid so far in the current year.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Compensation* £
1988	527,142
1989	2,826,788
1990	9,114,743
1991	16,329,348
1992	29,211,593
1993	38,054,040
1994[1]	9,189,290
Total	105,252,944

[1]As at 31 March 1994

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of cattle accepted as possible BSE cases by MAFF veterinary officers were confirmed histologically to suffer from BSE in each year from 1988 to 1993 and so far in the current year.

Mr. Soames: Of those cattle reported to the Ministry as suspect BSE cases and subsequently placed under movement restrictions, the following percentages have been confirmed on post-mortem examination in each year since the disease was made notifiable:

Year	*Per cent.*
1988	91·9
1989	88·5
1990	85·2
1991	86·2
1992	85·0
1993	83·7
[1]1994	81·2

[1] The 1994 figure is up to 10 June and is affected by the seasonal variation in the diagnostic rate. The percentage of cases which are confirmed on laboratory examination decreases in the spring due to the higher incidence of other seasonal neurological disorders, including listeriosis and metabolic diseases, which cannot always be differentiated from BSE on clinical grounds.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which EU countries operate a system of whole herd slaughter for BSE; and what proposals she has to introduce it to Britain.

Mr. Soames: The following EU member states operate or intend to operate such a policy as far as this Ministry is aware:

France, Denmark, Germany, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Netherlands (initial cases only), Spain (initial cases only).

In some cases herd slaughter is encouraged rather than enforced, and may be industry-funded.

There are no plans to introduce a herd slaughter policy in this country as such a measure is not scientifically justified. All the measures introduced in this country since BSE was identified have been endorsed by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee.

Beta-Agonists

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if she will make a statement on her policy towards imports of meat treated with beta-agonists;

(2) if she will make a statement on her policy in respect of beta-agonists.

Mr. Soames: My policy in respect of beta-agonists remains unchanged from that set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 26 October 1993, *Official Report*, column *562-63*.

Surveillance remains on-going and all the samples of home-produced and imported meat taken in Great Britain during 1993 and to date in 1994, and tested for the presence of beta-agonists, have proved to be negative.

Summary results of statutory surveillance are published each year in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate's annual report, and of non-statutory surveillance by the steering group on chemical aspects of food surveillance as periodic food surveillance papers. In addition, the results of both sampling programmes are published quarterly in the Medicines Act veterinary information service newsletter, published by the VMD. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what instructions are given to security staff in her departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Jack: Security staff have responsibilities for protecting the security of their buildings and its occupants. They have written guidance on allowing the entry of authorised persons. If anyone was deemed to be causing an obstruction to entry or exit or blocking an emergency fire exit, appropriate action would be taken, with the assistance of the police if necessary. There have been no reported problems caused by those sleeping rough in doorways or by beggars.

Calves (Exports)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how long is provided for local veterinary inspectors to examine calves for export; what guidelines she has laid down for the number that can be adequately inspected in an hour; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Ministry makes no stipulation on the time that such an examination should take. We uphold high veterinary standards in this country and our certifying veterinarians are expected to be rigorous in checking that the animal health conditions of the importing country are fully met before signing an export certificate. The time taken by a veterinary inspector for an examination also depends on the level of organisation of and degree of assistance provided by the exporter.

Goosanders

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences have been granted for the killing of goosanders in each of the last two years; in what regions these licences have been granted; and for what reasons.

Mr. Soames: Since January 1992 seven licences have been issued for the killing of goosanders. In all cases they were issued to prevent fish predation. The details are as follows:

County	Region	Number of licences January—December 1992	January—December 1993	January—May 1994
Cumbria	Northern	0	2	0
Hereford and Worcestershire	South Mercia	0	2	0
North Yorkshire	North East	0	2	0
Lancashire	Northern	0	1	0

Sea Defence

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which authorities are responsible for each aspect of flooding, sea defence and drainage; and what plans she has to revise these arrangements.

Mr. Jack: The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is responsible for flood and coastal defence policy in England. Under the relevant legislation, the authorities with operational powers are:

the National Rivers Authority, which can undertake measures to reduce the risks of flooding from designated "main rivers" and the sea and which is required to exercise a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence in England and Wales.

Internal Drainage Boards, which can carry out measures to alleviate flooding in specified districts with special drainage needs, other than on "main rivers";

local authorities, which can carry out flood defence works outside drainage board districts on watercourses other than "main rivers", as well as works to protect the land against coastal erosion.

It is envisaged that the proposed Environment Agency will assume the powers of the National Rivers Authority, but apart from this there are no plans to change these arrangements. Further information is given in the joint MAFF/Welsh Office publication "Strategy for Flood and Coastal Defence in England and Wales", which was published last October when copies were placed in the Library of the House.

Yare Barrier, Norfolk

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether her Department will review the funding criteria of the National Rivers Authority following the decision by the National Rivers Authority not to support the proposed Yare barrier in Norfolk on cost grounds.

Mr. Jack: To attract grant aid such works have to be technically sound, environmentally acceptable and economically worth while. I understand that the NRA's Norfolk and Suffolk local flood defence committee has confirmed its intention to promote a comprehensive river bank strengthening scheme for Broadland, but has concluded at this stage that the additional benefits generated by a Yare barrier would not justify the additional costs involved, although the option will be kept under review. There is nothing in this particular decision which leads me to believe that a review of the funding criteria is necessary.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Consultants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *492*, what the nature of the contracts with ACT Ltd. in 1990-91, 1992-93 and 1993-94 was; what was being requested and what was the value of the contracts.

The Attorney-General: The work undertaken by ACT Ltd. in the years in question related to support services for the Serious Fraud Office's central computer system as follows:

Year	Value £	Description of Work
1990-91	32,796	(1) Support for upgrading system (2) Supply of temporary system administrator
1992-93	17,907	30 days system support
1993-94	1,621	Specific assistance to in-house team

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service in each year since the instigation of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General: The number of defendants whose case was discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service in magistrates' courts since 1987 was as follows:

	Number
1987-88	108,900
1988-89	120,714
1989-90	140,313
1990-91	151,236
1991-92	174,411
1992-93	193,774
1993-94	168,707

These figures include proceedings dropped at court as well as those discontinued by way of notice under section 23 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. The figures comprise all cases dealt with by the CPS areas, but do not include the specialised casework handled by the headquarters of the service.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were *(a)* received by the Crown Prosecution Service from the police, *(b)* completed in the magistrates court, *(c)* discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service before or at the magistrates court hearing, *(d)* committed to the Crown court by the magistrates court or *(e)* otherwise disposed in each Crown Prosecution Service region for the year April 1993 to April 1994.

The Attorney-General: The table shows the number of defendants' cases dealt with by the 13 areas of the Crown Prosecution Service during the year ending March 1994. The figures do not include the specialised casework undertaken by the headquarters of the service.

The number received comprises all those forwarded to the CPS by the police during the year, and the number

finalised comprises all those completed during the year. Both totals include non-criminal proceedings, such as forfeiture proceedings under section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, and cases forwarded to the CPS by the police for pre-charge advice; the number of these is specified.

Cases completed in magistrates' courts comprise all defendants whose cases proceeded to either trial or guilty plea.

Discontinuances are inclusive of proceedings dropped in court as well as those which were the subject of a notice under section 23 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985.

Cases committed comprise all those committed for trial in the Crown court during the period.

Other disposals comprise the remaining completed cases: committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, defendants bound over to keep the peace without a trial having taken place, and cases in which the prosecution could not proceed, for example because the defendant had died or could not be traced.

Magistrates' Courts Cases 1993-94

CPS Area	*Received*	*Finalised*	*of which: Advice only*	*Completed in Magistrates' Court*	*Discontinued*	*Committed to Crown Court*	*Other disposals*	*Other proceedings*
North	101,284	101,576	4,094	68,212	13,769	7,246	6,773	1,476
Yorkshire	82,460	80,857	3,652	52,925	11,860	7,844	3,832	750
Mersey/Lancashire	90,333	89,546	3,014	62,982	8,971	8,815	4,851	913
Humber	73,500	71,386	7,268	46,360	7,988	5,673	2,226	1,871
North West	126,665	123,766	3,388	87,454	11,681	9,002	6,177	6,064
East Midlands	89,898	88,417	6,608	58,080	10,962	6,097	5,118	1,552
Wales	103,183	111,736	6,298	69,190	11,119	5,764	17,111	2,254
Midlands	115,623	117,330	5,443	74,001	13,503	8,426	13,755	2,202
Anglia	114,784	112,429	9,468	76,544	9,831	6,787	7,735	2,064
Severn/Thames	96,695	97,602	4,934	65,642	11,422	4,875	8,825	1,904
South West	75,873	75,002	2,884	52,581	8,714	5,003	4,912	908
London	276,913	274,524	9,892	150,954	36,208	19,217	53,968	4,284
South East	112,085	110,068	5,203	76,128	12,679	7,800	7,404	855
Total Areas	1,459,296	1,454,239	72,146	941,053	168,707	102,549	142,687	27,097

Notes:

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Other proceedings comprise non-criminal proceedings, such as forfeiture hearings under Section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the Director of Public Prosecutions to publish the revised code for Crown prosecutors.

The Attorney-General: The review of the code for Crown Prosecutors, which I announced in House on the 14 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *1049*, is now complete. The revised code is set out in full in the annual report of the Crown Prosecution Service, which was laid before Parliament at 11 am today and then published. Copies of the code have been printed and are now available for distribution. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The fundamental principles of the code have not changed, but the new code is substantially shorter and has been rewritten in straightforward English. The requirement for a realistic prospect of conviction has been clarified and the public interest factors in favour of a prosecution have been brought out more clearly.

I welcome the revised code and commend it to all prosecuting authorities.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to lay before Parliament and to publish the annual report of the Crown Prosecution Service for the year 1993-94.

The Attorney-General: The annual report for the Crown Prosecution Service was laid before Parliament at 11 am today and then published.

Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each group in the last three months.

The Attorney-General: No such problems have been experienced in the last three months. Security staff are required to ensure that access to departmental offices is unobstructed. No specific instructions have been given for dealing with those sleeping rough or beggars.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what previous diplomatic service the present United Kingdom high commissioner to Cyprus has had in *(a)* Greece and *(b)* Turkey.

Mr. Goodlad: The present British high commissioner to Cyprus, Mr. David Madden, has previously served as first secretary and head of chancery, Athens, from 1981-1984. He has not held a diplomatic post in Turkey.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons have served in Cyprus as high commissioner since June

1974; and how many of these high commissioners had previously held diplomatic posts in *(a)* Greece and *(b)* Turkey.

Mr. Goodlad: There have been seven British high commissioners to Cyprus since June 1974, including the present incumbent. Two previously held diplomatic posts in Greece and one in Turkey.

Italy

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the position of the Italian Government concerning revision of its borders with Austria and the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Italian Government have made it clear that they have no plans to seek the revision of Italy's borders with any neighbouring state.

Burma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the use of forced labour in the construction of a railroad in southern Burma; and what representations he has made to the Government of Burma about this abuse of human rights.

Mr. Goodlad: We are aware of the reported use of forced labour by the Burmese Government in the construction of a railway extension between Ye and Tavoy in southern Burma. We are working, within international forums, to bring pressure on the military regime in Burma to improve its human rights record and to end the use of forced labour.

Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has urged the Indonesian Government to investigate the reported killing of civilians by the security forces in Aceh between 1989 and 1991; and what was the response.

Mr. Goodlad: My predecessor, the Earl of Caithness, expressed our concern about the killings and human rights abuses in Aceh when he visited Jakarta in early May 1991; and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the issue with the Indonesian Foreign Minister later the same month. On both occasions, the Indonesians took careful note of our views.

Mr. Warwick Reid

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were each of the official positions in the Hong Kong Government of Mr. Warwick Reid up to 1991.

Mr. Goodlad: Mr. Warwick Reid was appointed by the Hong Kong Government as a Crown counsel in the prosecutions division of the Legal Department on 8 March 1975 and was promoted to senior Crown counsel in April 1977. He was promoted to deputy principal Crown counsel in April 1980. From April 1981 to January 1982, he was assistant to the Attorney-General. He returned to the prosecutions division in February 1982. He was promoted in March 1983 to principal Crown counsel. From then until his arrest in October 1989, he held the position of deputy Crown prosecutor in charge of the commercial crime unit of the prosecutions division. Mr. Reid was dismissed on 22 January 1990.

Brazil

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government of Brazil fulfilled their promise of 29 July 1993 to the XI session of the working group on indigenous populations that the physical demarcation of the Awa Guaja reserve and the Krikati reserve would be accomplished in 1993.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Brazilian authorities have informed our embassy in Brasilia that Government anthropologists have identified and marked out the limits of the Awa Guaja and Krikati reserves. Their findings have now to be submitted for legal process.

Genocide

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of accusations of genocide by one country in respect of another; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom is a party to the United Nations convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. It takes seriously all accusations of genocide by one country in respect of another.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British embassy in Santiago, Chile was advised that General Pinochet wished to visit Britain.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The British embassy in Santiago were not notified of the visit. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was advised by the Chilean embassy in London on 8 June.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings or hospitality was offered by Her Majesty's Government to General Pinochet during his recent visit to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This was a private visit. No meetings or hospitality were offered.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce initiatives or schemes designed to pass local authority housing stock to private sector interests; how many members of his Department are engaged in preparing policy papers on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My Department already has a programme of large-scale voluntary transfers of council

housing to housing associations. To date, 31 local authorities have transferred 142,000 properties through LSVT. Subject to tenant support, 12 more will transfer about 50,000 properties by the end of 1994-95. I am keen to expand the programme to bring to metropolitan and inner-city areas the benefits of transfer which we have seen in shire districts. The Department is jointly funding a study with five local authorities—Camden, Enfield, Sheffield, Manchester and Middlesbrough—and the Housing Corporation, which aims to identify options for the future ownership and management of housing in urban areas. This is due to report in the autumn. A group of four staff work predominantly on LSVTs, and a wide range of others are involved where appropriate.

Environmental Agencies

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will introduce legislation to pave the way for the creation of the Environment Agency for England and Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Mr. Atkins: It remains the Government's policy to introduce legislation to establish the environment agencies when parliamentary time allows.

Integrated Regional Offices

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which Department will be responsible for the new integrated regional offices.

Sir George Young: The Government offices for the regions are accountable to the Departments of the Environment, Employment, Trade and Industry and Transport, jointly or separately, as appropriate, for the programmes or functions that they deliver or oversee.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the officials appointed to co-ordinate the new integrated regional offices with contact addresses.

Sir George Young The information requested is as follows:

Government office for the North East
Regional Director: Pamela Denham
Contact address: Stanegate House
2 Groat Market
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 1YN

Government office for the North West
Regional Director: Marianne Neville Rolfe
Contact address: 2010 Sunley Tower
Piccadilly Plaza
Manchester
M1 4BA

Government office for Merseyside
Regional Director: John Stoker
Contact address: Room 404
Graeme House
Derby Square
Liverpool
L2 7SU

Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside
Regional Director: Jeremy Walker
Contact address: 7th Floor East Wing
City House
Leeds
LS1 4JD

Government office for the West Midlands
Regional Director: David Ritchie
Contact address: 77 Paradise Circus
Queensway
Birmingham
B1 2DT

Government office for the East Midlands
Regional Director: Mark Lanyon
Contact address: Level 5
Cranbrook House
Cranbrook Street
Nottingham
NG1 1EY

Government office for the Eastern Region
Regional Director: John Turner
Contact address: Heron House
49-53 Goldington Road
Bedford
MK40 3LL

Government office for the South West
Regional Director: Brian Leonard
Contact address: 4th Floor
The Pithay
Bristol
BS1 2NQ

Government office for the South East
Regional Director: Gillian Ashmore
Contact address: Charles House
375 Kensington High Street
London
W14 8QH

Government office for London
Regional Director: Robin Young
Contact address: Room P2/023
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 3EB

Fire Safety

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the reasons for his Department's decision not to implement the recommendations of the Efficiency Unit's scrutiny of the management of the Government's civil estate on provision of advice to Government Departments on fire safety and fire precautions; and if he will explain why it is intended to stop the provision of such advice.

Mr. Baldry: No such decision has been taken. We envisage that, in line with the efficiency scrutiny's recommendation, written guidance will be promulgated via the advice unit of the proposed new property agency. The decision to withdraw some fire branch services will not stop Departments obtaining appropriate advice on fire protection for particular buildings or on staff training, whether by using in-house resources or available commercial services.

Acid Rain

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he plans to make to the petition handed to him by his Norwegian counterpart in Oslo on 14 June, from Norwegian citizens urging Her Majesty's Government to cut acid rain deposits over Scandinavia arising from discharges in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: In Oslo on 14 June, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State signed the second United Nations Commission for Europe sulphur protocol, which commits the United Kingdom to reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide by 80 per cent. compared with 1980 levels by 2010. This will not only deal substantially with problems of acidification in the United Kingdom but will also bring about significant improvements for our European neighbours.

While he was in Oslo, my right hon. Friend met representatives of the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature, to receive their petition, and of Councillors Against Acid Rain. He explained the significant reductions in sulphur emissions which the United Kingdom has already achieved and the new obligations to achieve further reductions which we have accepted.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if she will list by county the current estimate of the red squirrel population; what were the comparable figures *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Red squirrel population figures have never been compiled by county. The latest population estimates for Great Britain are: Scotland 121,000; England 30,000 and Wales 9,000. There are no comparable figures for five or 10 years ago.

Support for the remaining populations of red squirrels include full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and measures to restrict the spread of grey squirrels. English Nature's species recovery programme, which aims to achieve long-term sustainable survival of endangered species, includes red squirrels.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and (i) Pannel Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) any other services in 1980 to 1983, 1984 to 1987, 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Sea Defences

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what evidence his Department has as to whether sand and gravel extraction is damaging natural sea defences and increasing the vulnerability of the coastal areas to flooding;

(2) how many extraction licences have been granted for areas off the Norfolk coast, and for each licence *(a)* to whom the licence has been issued, *(b)* the location of the site, *(c)* the licence fee and *(d)* the quantity permitted to be extracted.

Mr. Baldry: We have no evidence to indicate that sand and gravel extraction is damaging natural sea defences and increasing the vulnerability of the coastal areas to flooding. Licences for marine dredging are issued by the Crown Estate Commissioners. Applications are referred by the Crown Estate to consultants for professional advice on whether the proposed dredging would have an adverse effect upon coastal protection. If the advice demonstrates unavoidable risk of coastal erosion, the application will be rejected without further consideration.

I understand that the Crown Estate Commissioners have issued 15 licences for dredging off the Norfolk Coast as follows:

Area	*Company*
Area 107	East Coast Aggregates Ltd.
Area 202	ARC Marine Ltd.
Area 212	ARC Marine Ltd.
Area 228	Volker Dredging Ltd.
Area 240	Civil and Marine Ltd.
Area 242	ARC Marine Ltd.
Area 251	East Coast Aggregates Ltd.
Area 254	United Marine Dredging Ltd.
Area 296	United Marine Dredging Ltd.
Area 319	East Coast Aggregates Ltd.
Area 328	ARC Marine Ltd.
Area 328	Civil and Marine Ltd.
Area 329	Civil and Marine Ltd.
Area 360	South Coast Shipping Co. Ltd.
Area 361	ARC Marine Ltd.

The total extraction allowed under these licences is 10·85 million tonnes. I will send the hon. Member information about the location of the sites. Information about licence fees is treated as commercial in confidence.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Norfolk residents concerned that new building will not be possible in areas of Norfolk because of flooding risk.

Mr. Baldry: We have received a number of representations about the designation of flood risk areas by North Norfolk district council in the consultation draft of the local plan.

Development, Leigh-on-Sea

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will overrule the planning inspectorate and order an appeal held in public into the proposed development at Marine parade, Leigh-on-Sea, about which the right hon. Member for Southend, West has been in correspondence with him.

Mr. Baldry: No. I am satisfied that the planning merits of the proposal can be considered adequately on the basis of written representations and a site visit. The inspector will take the strength of local feeling about the proposals fully into account in reaching a decision.

Packaging

Mr. Alnger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce provisions to establish legally enforceable targets for the avoidance, minimisation and recycling of packaging waste.

Mr. Atkins: We believe that the approach which underlies our producer responsibility initiative for

packaging waste will enable industry to devise the most cost-effective and flexible means of securing our environmental objectives, including the recovery of between 50 and 75 per cent. of all packaging waste by the year 2000. We are awaiting further advice from industry on how the plan which it has drawn up can best be implemented.

We will consider legislating to meet our objectives if industry can demonstrate that a purely voluntary approach will not succeed or if it is necessary to fulfil our obligations under the proposed EC directive on packaging and packaging waste.

Incineration

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the chemical composition of material which it is planned to burn in an industrial process is taken into account when Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution considers whether to grant an authorisation for the burning of the material.

Mr. Atkins: The chemical composition of the material is taken into account when HMIP considers whether to grant an authorisation for the burning of the material.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure that the burning of hazardous wastes will be subject to the same emission standards wherever it takes place.

Mr. Atkins: HMIP has confirmed that it will control the burning of hazardous wastes in processes subject to its control, in such a way as to ensure uniform protection for the environment.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances HMIP may authorise the burning of hazardous waste other than in an incinerator designed for the purpose.

Mr. Atkins: HMIP may authorise the burning of hazardous waste, other than in an incinerator designed for the purpose, provided that emissions from the burning will not adversely affect the environment.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution may authorise the burning of a substance whose chemical composition is unknown.

Mr. Atkins: HMIP will not authorise the burning of a substance whose chemical composition is unknown.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether hazardous wastes burnt in cement kilns are subject to the same emission standards as wastes burnt in an incinerator.

Mr. Atkins: Emission standards for cement kilns burning waste will be based on environmental protection and BATNEEC—best available techniques not entailing excessive cost. Precautions will be taken to guard against increase in environmental impact, compared with the use of conventional fuels.

Industrial Processes

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how long a trial may continue before authorisation of an industrial process is either granted or withheld.

Mr. Atkins: The justification for, and the details and length of any trial, are provided by the operator, and must be to the satisfaction of HMIP. Any trial must comply with the criteria laid down by HMIP and be of sufficient duration to provide adequate monitoring information, in order to enable HMIP fully to assess the environmental impact.

Recycling

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage the markets for recycled products from waste packaging materials.

Mr. Atkins: Action to stimulate markets for recycled materials is a key element of the producer responsibility challenge to the packaging industries. If those industries are to achieve their target of recovering 58 per cent. of used packaging by the year 2000 in the most cost-effective way, they will need to ensure not only that used packaging is collected but that there are markets for the recycled material, and that buyer specifications do not unreasonably restrict these markets.

Environment Land Management

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the future administration of the countryside stewardship scheme and the hedgerow incentive scheme.

Mr. Gummer: I congratulate the Countryside Commission on its development and administration of the countryside stewardship scheme and the hedgerow incentive scheme, which have broken new ground in environmental land management. I acknowledge the valuable support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, English Nature and English Heritage in carrying forward the schemes with my Department. I have endorsed the commission's proposal to bring the schemes together so as to enable best use of staff time and to streamline their delivery to farmers and other landowners.

The countryside stewardship scheme will complete its pilot phase on 31 March 1996. Thereafter and with her agreement, I intend to transfer responsibility for this scheme and the hedgerow incentive scheme from the Countryside Commission to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Government intends to legislate, when parliamentary time permits, to confer on the Minister the necessary powers to enable her to make payments under the hedgerow incentive scheme and those parts of countryside stewardship which are covered neither by the EC agri-environment regulation nor by the powers that the Minister already exercises under the farm and conservation grant scheme. The Government also intend such legislation to confer a statutory advisory role on the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage in relation to the development of all of the Ministry of Agriculture's environmental land management schemes.

The Government value the contribution which farmers, landowners and many local organisations have made to the development and implementation of the two schemes, and we shall continue to build on this partnership.

The Government intend, in the light of the pilot phase, to consider the future role of countryside stewardship. We also intend to consider ways of better integrating and

focusing all environmental land management schemes. We shall consult publicly on any proposals to change significantly current arrangements for countryside stewardship or other environmental land management schemes.

The Government place a high value on the skills and experience of the staff currently running the countryside stewardship and hedgerow incentive schemes. The staff needed to run the schemes after the countryside stewardship pilot phase has ended will be invited to transfer to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Inner Cities

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the inner cities research programme report "Assessing the Impact of Urban Policy"; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The inner cities research programme report "Assessing the Impact of Urban Policy" is being published today by HMSO. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report is a substantial and wide-ranging analysis, covering the policies and programmes of several Government Departments and agencies over the period 1979-80 to 1990-91. It concludes that, across the 57 urban priority areas there was, over that period, a relative improvement in their social and economic fortunes, and that the gap between these 57 areas and other areas narrowed in the 1980s, notwithstanding some deterioration in the core areas facing the most intractable problems. It further concludes that across the whole set of targeted places and in the smaller areas within some of the conurbations, public resources appear to have made an impact on improving inner-city areas.

The report draws five policy conclusions about how the delivery of Government programmes might be further improved and about how local authorities and communities might be more effectively involved in regeneration. These recommendations have been addressed by the major reforms which the Secretary of State for the Environment announced in November 1993, and which were implemented in April 1994 after the report was completed.

These reforms include the establishment of Government offices for the regions, bringing together the regional offices of the Department of the Environment, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Employment and the Department of Transport to make Government more responsive and accessible to local communities and employers; and the single regeneration budget, worth some £1·4 billion in 1994-95, which combines 20 programmes from five Government Departments to support locally devised measures to encourage regeneration, economic development and industrial competitiveness.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what facilities, and at what cost, were borne by the Central Office of Information on the recent visit to Britain of General Pinochet.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Central Office of Information provided no facilities during the recent visit to Britain of General Pinochet.

Disabled People (Employment)

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the level of compliance of each Government Department with the requirements of the quota for the employment of disabled persons.

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on 9 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *63*.

I also refer the hon. Member to table 1 of "Independent 22", published by the Cabinet Office, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. This lists the numbers and percentages of civil servants registered as disabled in major Government Departments and agencies.

SCOTLAND

Deer Culling

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the currently approved methods of deer culling; and what plans he has to approve further methods.

Sir Hector Monro: The only currently approved method of deer culling is by shooting, using an approved firearm as defined in sections 23(2) and 23A of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959, as amended, and the Deer (Firearms etc.) (Scotland) Order 1985. I have no plans at present to approve any further methods.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Ian Lang: There have been no incidents of anyone sleeping rough outside my Department's London office and no instructions have been issued. The number of reported incidents involving beggars in the immediate vicinity is nil.

Air Routes

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what criteria he applies in determining which air routes to designate as public service obligation routes;

(2) what financial support he offers to public service obligation air routes;

(3) which air routes he has designated as public service obligation routes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Central Government support for air services is considered only where the services cross regional or islands council boundaries; cross water; are essential to the life of a remote community; and where there is no prospect of services becoming commercially viable.

EU regulation 2408/92 requires public service obligations to be imposed on air services supported by public funds. A PSO has been imposed on the air service between Glasgow, Tiree and Barra. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State provides financial support of £115,000 per annum for the service.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the purpose of the meeting about Pan Am 103 and Lockerbie, between George Esson, then chief constable of the Dumfries and Galloway police, and Janet Reno, Attorney-General of the United States; and what was the outcome.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 May, *Official Report*, column *164*. The meeting was of a courtesy nature and had no specific outcome.

Orthopaedics

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current waiting list and waiting time for each orthopaedic speciality in the Ayrshire and Arran health board area.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* At 31 December 1993 there were 842 patients on in-patient and day case orthopaedic surgery waiting lists in the Ayrshire and Arran health board area. Half those orthopaedic surgery patients who were treated and discharged from hospitals in the Ayrshire and Arran health board area during the quarter ending 31 December 1993 had waited less than 47 days before being admitted.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

President Mengistu Haile Mariam

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy toward the request of the transitional Government of Ethiopia for the extradition of ex-President Mengistu Haile Mariam from Zimbabwe.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is a matter for the two Governments concerned.

TREASURY

Brewing Industry

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he has had about the introduction of a sliding scale of duty for small brewers producing less than 200 barrels per week.

Sir John Cope: We have received representations from many small brewers and had meetings with their trade body, the Small Independent Brewers Association. There are no current plans to introduce sliding scales of excise duties on the beer produced by smaller brewers, partly because, under the general agreement on tariffs and trade, the lowest rate available to any United Kingdom producer would also have to be made available to all producers outside the European Union.

Tax Office Staff, South Yorkshire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff there were at each tax office in South Yorkshire *(a)* at the latest date, *(b)* 12 months ago and *(c)* 24 months ago; and if he will make a statement on the causes of changes in the numbers employed at each office.

Mr. Dorrell: The numbers of staff in post at the relevant dates are shown in the table.

This table compares the staff-in-post position for all offices—excluding the Valuation Office, which has agency status—within the geographical boundary of Inland Revenue South Yorkshire executive office. Because of the large number of locations involved, some summarising has been necessary. It has not been practicable to look at reasons behind the changes in numbers of staff on an office-by-office basis.

During these two years, part of Inland Revenue London head office has been transferred to Nottingham. Three offices set up in Nottingham and Barnsley during 1991-92 to deal with expected claims for repayment of composite rate tax have been closed—this work has now been concentrated into just five offices outside SYEO. Following the closures of these offices, PAYE work was moved from other offices in SYEO to Barnsley to provide work for otherwise surplus staff. Almost all trust work has been brought together into two large offices, one in Nottingham. SYEO has carried out an efficiency scrutiny of typing and secretarial services resulting in a reduction in the number of posts. The remaining posts have been reorganised into a separate service unit.

Also over the two years, a number of procedural changes in tax office work, including for example the simplification of PAYE end of year work, have contributed to further changes in staff numbers.

South Yorkshire staff in post

Regional Executive Office/Towns	*1 June 1992 Total staff*	*1 June 1993 Total staff*	*1 June 1994 Total staff*
Alfreton	79	71	69
Barnsley	216	162	161
Boston	87	83	75
Bradford	989	884	821
Chesterfield	126	117	112
Derby	304	282	274
Dewsbury	83	76	72
Doncaster	165	148	144
Gainsborough	46	40	38
Grantham	76	70	69
Halifax	124	115	118
Huddersfield	167	151	153
Leeds	768	683	662
Lincoln	144	125	125
Louth	43	40	37
Mansfield	85	73	68

Regional Executive Office/Towns	1 June 1992 Total staff	1 June 1993 Total staff	1 June 1994 Total staff
Melton Mowbray	51	46	42
Newark	66	56	55
Nottingham	596	527	518
Pontefract	68	59	61
Retford	45	40	40
Rotherham	80	75	73
Sheffield	489	767	757
Shipley	190	182	164
Spalding	60	53	52
Wakefield	77	77	70
Accounts Office Shipley	1,138	1,163	1,064
Other Executive Offices/Head Office	631	1,117	1,260
Grand Total	6,993	7,282	7,154

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Lands Tribunal

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the present salary of the president of the Lands Tribunal; and what it was *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The office of president of the Lands Tribunal in Northern Ireland is a group 5 post within the senior salary review body structure, with a salary of £82,641. Five years ago the salary was £53,400, while in 1984 it was £33,733.

Civil Servants (Outside Appointments)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many job offers were reported by staff in his Department under the requirements of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments in each of the last 10 years by *(a)* staff of grade 3 and above, *(b)* staff below grade 3, *(c)* staff in sections concerned with procurement or contract work, under section 15 of the rules of 1 February 1993 and *(d)* staff in other sections, under section 14; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested in respect of staff of grade 3 and above could not be collected in the time available. For staff below grade 3, there is no requirement for the Department to collect information on job offers made to staff. Records are not, therefore, kept and no information is available. No offers have been reported from staff who work in sections concerned with procurement or contracts.

Public Consultation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what circumstances it is his Department's practice, when issuing a public consultation document, to inform those consulted that their responses will be made public unless they explicitly ask for them to be kept confidential; and if he will arrange for his Department to do so in all cases in future.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is now the usual practice of the Lord Chancellor's Department, when issuing a public consultation document, to inform those consulted that their responses may be made public unless they request confidential treatment. The Department will continue that practice.

Small Claims Courts

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the amount of each increase in the small claims court limit and the date on which it came into effect for each year since 1973.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I list the small claims limits in the county courts since 1973 and the dates they came into effect:

Date	Limit £
October 1973	75
October 1974	100
July 1978	200
October 1981	500
July 1991	1,000

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the average sum awarded by small claims courts for each year since 1985.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information is not routinely gathered by my Department.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases in each year since 1991 have been referred out of the small claims court procedure to the county courts under the safeguards contained in order 19, rule 3 of the county court rules.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Solicitors' Firms (Franchises)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the names of all the solicitors' firms which have so far applied to the Legal Aid Board for a franchise.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The names of individual firms of solicitors which have applied to the Legal Aid Board for a franchise is a matter of confidence between those firms and the board.

Spending Review

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he has determined a date on which he will publish the findings of his Department's fundamental review of its spending.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *329*. The fundamental review is being conducted internally and its findings will not be published. Any resulting change in policy will, however, be announced in the usual way in due course.

Class Actions

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress his Department has made on drawing up new rules for the bringing of class actions; and when he expects to publish them.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The findings of the Department's fundamental review of expenditure, which includes a review of multi-party actions, are scheduled to be presented to the Lord Chancellor later this month. Any action which the Lord Chancellor decides to take as a result of the review's conclusions will, however, be preceded by public consultation in the usual way.

Personal Injury Claims

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average cost per case of a plaintiff's disbursements for the provision of all witnesses and reports in personal injury claims where proceedings were commenced in county courts for each year since 1990.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the £112·50 maximum for the payment of expert witnesses as set out in the consultation paper on small personal injury claims is the total sum available for the payment of all expert witnesses involved in a small personal injury case or the maximum allowable for the payment of each individual expert witness.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is proposed that the sum of £112·50 should be the maximum recoverable for the expenses of each individual expert witness. It must be borne in mind, however, that the actual figure allowed for each expert and the number of such experts deemed necessary remain in the discretion of the district judge.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the organisations responding to the consultation document on small personal injury claims.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A list of major organisations which responded to the consultation paper is given.

Action for Victims of Medical Accidents
Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union
Association of British Insurers
Association of Personal Injury Lawyers
Automobile Association
British Legal Association
British Medical Association
Bus and Coach Council
Forum of Insurance Lawyers
General Council of the Bar
Institute of Consumer Affairs
Institute of Legal Executives
Institute of Professional Managers and Specialists
Law Society
Lloyd's of London
Medical Defence Union
Medical Protection Society
Motor Accident Solicitors' Society
Motor Insurers' Bureau
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
National Consumer Council
National Union of Mineworkers
Police Federation
Royal Automobile Club
Royal College of General Practitioners
Trades Union Council

Insurance Firms

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints his Department received concerning the conduct of lawyers acting on behalf of insurance firms in the settlement of claims for each year since 1990.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Solicitors are members of an independent and self-regulating profession, and the Lord Chancellor is not responsible for their professional conduct. The Law Society has responsibility to ensure that solicitors observe proper standards, and in 1986 established the Solicitors Complaints Bureau to handle complaints against its members. My Department has no record of such complaints.

HEALTH

Out-patient Waiting Times

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were seen as out-patients in 1991-92 and what was the average time between referral and being seen.

Mr. Sackville: The total number of all out-patient attendances in 1991-92 was 36·9 million. Of these 8,035,959 in 1991-92 were for a first appointment. No information is available centrally on time between referral and appointment.

Substance Abuse (Children)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths of children in each year since 1979 from substance abuse and from use of controlled drugs, by drug.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the number of deaths associated with the abuse of volatile substances and the number of deaths from the use of controlled drugs is shown in the tables. Data for the latter are not readily available for years prior to 1989.

Number of Deaths of Children (aged under 20) associated with the Abuse of Volatile Substances—Great Britain[1]

	Number
1980	24
1981	33
1982	39
1983	58
1984	64
1985	88
1986	71
1987	79
1988	96
1989	71
1990	116
1991	77

[1] These figures were supplied by St. George's Hospital Medical School.

Number of deaths (whether an accident, suicide or undetermined) of Children (aged under 20) associated with controlled drugs, by drug—Great Britain[2]

	1989	1990	1991	1992
Amphetamine	0	0	0	1
Barbiturates	1	0	1	0
Benzodiazepines	7	2	3	10
Buprenorphine	0	0	0	0
Cannabis	1	0	1	0
Cocaine	0	0	1	0
Codeine	1	1	2	0
Dextromoramide	0	1	0	0
Dextroproxyphene	30	13	28	19
Diethylproprion	—	—	0	0
Dihydrocodeine	2	2	3	2
Dipipanone	0	0	0	0
Heroin	3	1	2	2
LSD	—	—	1	2
MDMA	1	—	4	0
Meprobromate	0	0	0	0
Methadone	4	6	8	20
Methaqualone	0	0	0	0
Morphine	0	4	1	5
Opiates	1	1	1	1
Pentazocine	0	1	0	0
Pethidine	0	1	0	0
Phentermine	—	0	0	0
All deaths associated with controlled drugs	47	30	54	51

[2] This table shows the number of deaths where a controlled drug (listed under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971) was mentioned in the records of deaths assigned to accidental and other poisoning by solid or liquid substances. Where two or more drugs are mentioned together the death is recorded against each drug but only once in the total.
— Indicates not published.

We are spending £5 million a year on campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of drug and solvent misuse. This includes a £2·6 million national television and press campaign which ran from January to March 1994 to encourage and help parents to talk to their children about drugs and solvents. We have produced information leaflets to help parents with this, as well as leaflets with factual information for young people.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the number of deaths per year in England and Wales which are causally linked with emissions from diesel-powered road vehicles.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions are given to security staff in her departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not issued formal instructions to security staff in London for dealing with those sleeping rough in the doorways or begging in the vicinity of departmental offices. These incidents are dealt with on an individual basis depending on the circumstances and with consideration for the situation of the person involved. No incidents of this nature have been reported by security staff in the last three months.

Obstetric Cholestasis

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what epidemiological studies funded by her Department have been undertaken into obstetric cholestasis.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Private Patients

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what value has been attributed by her Department to income from private patients in the years 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1996-97.

Mr. Sackville: Private patient activity is determined locally. No estimate of private patient income has been made centrally.

Child Minders

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answers of 25 March, *Official Report*, column *683* and 25 April, *Official Report*, column *59*, what conclusions she has reached on whether further clarification of her Department's guidance on behaviour and sanctions by child minders if minded children misbehave is required; and if she will make a statement on the role of physical punishment in the child care environment.

Mr. Bowis: We are currently consulting interested parties on this issue.

Mentally Ill People

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the report on homicides prepared by the confidential inquiry into homicides and suicides by mentally ill people to be completed; and when it will be published.

Mr. Bowis: The first report has been now completed but it has not yet been received by Ministers.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the remit of the inquiry into homicides by mentally ill people could be extended so as to include those who have been in active psychiatric care within the previous five years instead of within the previous year only;

(2) whether the present remit of the inquiry into homicides by mentally ill people includes those who should have received psychiatric care during the previous year but who discharged themselves from hospital or failed to keep out-patient appointments.

Mr. Bowis: The remit of the confidential inquiry is sufficiently wide to cover patients under the care of specialist psychiatric services who discharged themselves from hospital or failed to keep out-patient appointments within the year prior to their involvement in a homicide. As the inquiry relies on information received from clinical staff responsible for the care of the psychiatric patient prior to the homicide, it would be impracticable to extend its remit to cover a five-year period.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the compatibility of the imposition of charges for attendance at local authority day centres by mentally ill people and the care programme approach.

Mr. Bowis: The introduction of the care programme approach from April 1991 did not affect the discretionary powers of local authorities to make reasonable charges for day centre attendance by mentally ill people. It is for individual local authorities to decide whether and to what extent to make such charges and to ensure that their arrangements for making charges are fully compatible with the principles of the care programme approach, including the requirement for the care plan to be agreed with the mentally ill person. Any charges must take into account the person's ability to pay and are subject to an appeals procedure.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the members of the inquiry into the murder of an occupational therapist at the Edith Morgan unit, Torbay, by a patient in that unit in 1993.

Mr. Bowis: The members of the inquiry team are: Sir Louis Blom-Cooper QC, chairman of the Mental Health Act Commission, Miss Helen Hally, director of nursing practice at Riverside mental health national health service trust, and Professor Elaine Murphy, professor of old age psychiatry at the United medical and dental school at Guy's and St. Thomas's hospitals.

Departmental Running Costs

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will itemise the other expenditure in her Department's running costs shown in page 25 of table 12 in the departmental report 1994-95.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table:

£ million

	1988-89 outturn	*1989-90 outturn*	*1990-91 outturn*	*1991-92 outturn*	*1992-93 outturn*	*1993-94 estimated outturn*
Departmental administration						
Non-staffing costs	77	79	100	112	133	122
VAT refunds on contracted-out services	0	−2	−1	−2	−1	−1
NHS Estates Agency						
Non-staffing costs	0	0	0	4	3	5
NHS Pensions Agency						
Non-staffing costs	0	0	0	0	0	12
Youth Treatment Service						
Non-staffing costs	1	1	2	2	1	2
Medicines Control Agency						
Non-staffing costs	3	2	3	3	3	0
Total	81	80	105	118	140	139

Notes:

1. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding effects.
2. The 1993-94 figures given are the estimates which were current at the time the Departmental Report was published.

Infertility

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of district health authorities have a comprehensive contract for infertility services.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service executive does not collect information on contracts agreed between district health authorities and hospitals for individual treatments or services.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provision is made for *(a)* infertility treatment and *(b)* infertility investigation in the North Nottinghamshire and Nottinghamshire health authorities;

(2) what advice the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham health authorities have sought from her Department as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment.

Mr. Sackville: For the information requested about infertility investigation and treatment in North Nottinghamshire and Nottinghamshire the hon. Member may wish to contact Sir David White, chairman of Nottinghamshire health authority, and Mr. A. Tolhurst, chairman of North Nottinghamshire health authority. I am not aware of requests for advice on this matter from either of the health authorities.

The national health service provides a wide range of treatments for subfertility and I refer the hon. Member to

the reply, that I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 18 May, *Official Report*, column *520*.

Rural Community Hospitals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names and locations of rural community hospitals in England.

Mr. Sackville: Central returns of hospital activity data do not contain the classification "rural community hospital".

Accident and Emergency Services, Barking and Havering

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names of those who responded to consultation on proposals by Barking and Havering health authority for changes to accident and emergency services.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Barking and Havering health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Mr. Bryan Littlewood, for details.

Infant Mortality

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the figures for infant mortality by district health authority for each of the last two years for which statistics are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information can be found in table 1 of the DH3 Monitors 93/1 and 92/1 for the last two years for which statistics are available, published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Trusts (Capital Investment)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, by trust, the amount of capital investment planned for 1994-95, and the amount of capital investment, by trust, for 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: Information for 1993-94 will be available later in the year when the accounts of trusts are audited. Trusts develop plans for capital expenditure in the current and future years within the overall constraints of their external financing limit and any necessary approval from the national health service executive for major capital schemes. Disclosure of planned capital expenditure may in some circumstances be commercially sensitive and it is therefore for individual trusts to determine the extent to which plans are disclosed.

Wythenshawe Hospital Development Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 19 April, *Official Report*, columns *474-75*, what progress has been made on the revision of the Wythenshawe hospital development scheme.

Mr. Sackville: The South Manchester University national health service trust is continuing to develop proposals for the redevelopment of Wythenshawe hospital. This will have to await the outcome of a clinical review of hospital services in south Manchester. This is being conducted by Professor Sir Herbert Duthie, provost of Cardiff medical school, who will report back to the North West regional health authority as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

Road Construction

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department or agencies take when placing contracts or inviting bids for the construction of roads, in order to ensure value for money and competition.

Mr. Key: Since 1 April, responsibility for managing, maintaining and improving the national road network in England now lies with the Highways Agency. As the information requested by the hon. Member relates to the agency which is responsible, I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 21 June 1994.

You put down a Parliamentary Question for answer by the Secretary of State concerning the measures taken to ensure value for money and competition when inviting bids or placing contracts for road construction work.

As your Question deals with operational matters for which the Highways Agency is now responsible, as promised by the Minister, Robert Key, I am replying.

To ensure value for money, the Highways Agency relies principally on inviting competitive bids for work to be carried out in accordance with a detailed design and specification.

We are required by EC Directives (now enacted in domestic legislation) to advertise all public works contracts with an estimated value in excess of ECU 5 million (currently about £3·7 million). The Agency goes further by voluntarily advertising all contracts with an estimated value in excess of £1 million. This is in order to seek out the widest possible market competition and to maximise competitive opportunities for the industry.

Contracts are awarded either on the basis of the lowest price, or the most economically advantageous bid after taking into account other factors such as the time taken to complete the work, or the likely future maintenance costs of the form of construction chosen by individual bidders.

The Agency is continually looking at ways of improving value for money and increasing numbers of contracts, mainly for new roads, are being invited on a "design and build" basis. This encourages contractors to draw on their particular skills and experience in putting forward innovative construction proposals which offer greater "buildability" and better value for money for the taxpayer.

The Department of Transport is also exploring more radical ways of achieving better value for money for the taxpayer and has recently invited expressions of interest to design, build, finance and operate new roads.

Road Construction Companies

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the largest 10 contracts he or agencies of his Department have placed with contractors for the construction of roads, in each year from 1991-92, together with the value of those contracts in cash terms.

Mr. Key: Since 1 April, responsibility for managing maintaining and improving the national road network in England now lies with the Highways Agency. As the information requested by the hon. Member relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency, I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 21 June 1994:

You put down a Parliamentary Question for answer by the Secretary of State for Transport asking him to list the 10 largest contracts by value for the construction of roads awarded in each year from 1991-92.

As the information you asked for concerns operational matters for which the Highways Agency is now responsible, as promised by the Minister, Robert Key, I am replying to your Questions.

The information requested is set out in the attached tables.

Highest 10 contracts awarded in 1991-92

Scheme	*Winning tender*	*Award price £*	*Date of award*
M20 Junctions 5-8 improvement	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	68,804,939	4 July 1991
M5 Widening Junctions 6-8	John Laing Construction Ltd.	59,368,900	6 June 1991
M1-A1 Link, Contracts 2 and 3 East of Naseby	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	35,617,820	19 November 1991
A30 Okehampton-Launceston	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	26,809,215	29 August 1991
A20 Courtwood-Dover, Contract 3	Norwest Holst Construction Ltd.	21,684,567	14 May 1991
A41 Kings Langley Bypass, Contract 3	AF Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	19,967,881	19 June 1991
A41 Berkhamsted Bypass, Contract 4B	Amey Construction Ltd.	18,139,479	11 December 1991
M1-A1 Link, Thrapston-Brampton, Contract 9	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	16,364,732	9 October 1991
A23 Warninglid Flyover to Sayers Common	Costain Civil Engineering Ltd.	15,685,563	9 October 1991
A20 Folkestone-Courtwood Contract 2 (Viaduct)	Birse Construction Ltd.	11,550,041	5 December 1991

Highest 10 contracts awarded in 1993-94

Scheme	*Winning tenderer*	*Award price £ million*	*Date of award*
A13 Thames Avenue—Wennington	Balfour Beatty Ltd	71,273,666	9 February 1994
M65 Blackburn Southern Bypass, Contract 1	Tarmac Construction Ltd	65,861,695	4 February 1994
A1 Walshford—Dishforth, North of Wetherby	Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd/Amec Civil Engineering joint venture	53,795,508	8 April 1993
M25 Between Junction 7 (Merstham) and Junction 8 (Reigate)	John Laing Construction Ltd	45,979,928	25 January 1994
A4/A46 Batheaston—Swainswick Bypass	Amey Construction Ltd	44,953,293	11 February 1994
A249 Between Bobbing and North of Iwade, Kent	Amec Civil Engineering Ltd	35,721,035	25 January 1994
A417 Brockworth Bypass, East of Gloucester	Wimpey Construction Ltd	35,142,010	2 December 1993
M25 Widening Between Junctions 10 and 11	John Mowlem Construction Ltd	35,097,353	23 December 1993
A12 Hackney Wick to Redbridge Roundabout Contract 4	Norwest Holst Construction Ltd	31,558,185	27 July 1993
A50 Blythe Bridge—Contract 1B	Christiani/Kier joint venture	28,414,397	21 January 1994

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Norris: Security staff are advised to deal with any incident in an appropriate manner and to draw attention to local welfare facilities if that may help. My Department has no record of any problems in the last three months.

Seat Belts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) *Official Report*, 25 February, column *464*, if he has now received the report on the technical and cost implications of seat belts in minibuses and coaches; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I now have the report to hand and hope to be able to make an announcement shortly. Copies of the relevant papers will then be deposited in the Library.

Marine Safety

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to extend port state control inspections in the light of the Donaldson report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: We believe that port state control can operate effectively only if co-ordinated on a regional basis. Lord Donaldson also recognised this in recommending that we build upon the success of the Paris memorandum of understanding by adopting a system of self-targeting and enhancing the deterrent effect of port state inspections. The Secretary of State made it clear in his statement of 17 May that we would pursue Lord Donaldson's recommendations with our European partners. He raised the issue at the Transport Council on 13 June and we intend to take every opportunity to develop these proposals further in discussion with our colleagues in the Paris MOU and the EU.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Foreign Secretary in respect of defective Russian and Baltic ships; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Department of Transport and Foreign and Commonwealth officials have worked together in responding to the problems that have arisen in respect of ships from the Russian Federation and the Baltic states. Officials from both Departments have discussed the problems with diplomatic representatives of the states concerned emphasising the need for effective action in respect of defective ships flying their flags.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* Russian and *(b)* Baltic State ships the Marine Safety Agency has detained in British ports since 1 April on account of (i) unseaworthiness or (ii) serious defects.

Mr. Norris: The number of Russian-registered and Baltic states-registered ships detained by the Marine Safety Agency as unsafe or for non-compliance with merchant shipping regulations between 1 April and 10 June 1994 is given in the table:

	Russian	*Baltic States*
Unsafe	1	Nil
Non-compliance with merchant shipping regulations	5	1

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff there are in each grade at each Marine Safety Agency office; and what is the address of each office.

Mr. Norris: Robin Bradley, the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency will send a reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 17 March 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Transport about the number of staff there are in each grade at each marine safety agency office, and the address of each office.

Please find attached a table showing the number of staff in post for Headquarters and each marine district by grade and a list of addresses for each office.

Staff in post

Office	*Number of staff at grade*										
	4	*5*	*6*	*7*[1]	*SEO*	*SURV*	*HEO*	*EO*	*AO*	*AA*	*Others*[2]
Spring Place	1	3	9	32	2	18	20	21·5	27	8	13
London District	—	—	1	7	—	10	1	1	7	1	2
South and South West District	—	—	1	5	—	15	1	2	5	2	4·5
North East and East District	—	—	1	9	—	15·5	1	2	6	—	9·5
North West and Wales District	—	—	1	5	—	12	1	2	7	3	5
West of Scotland and Northern Ireland District	—	—	1	5	—	15	1	1	3	3	4
East of Scotland District	—	—	1	6	—	11	1	1	5·5	2	3

[1] Includes Principal Surveyors.
[2] Includes personal secretaries, typists, casuals, messengers.

HEADQUARTERS
Spring Place, 105 Commercial Road, Southampton, Hants SO15 1EG
Tel: 0703 329100

LONDON DISTRICT
District Marine Office
District Chief Surveyor
Central Court, 1b Knoll Rise, Orpington, Kent BR6 0JA
Tel: 0689 890400

District Sub-Office
59 Deneside, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk NR30 2HL
Tel: 0493 851421

SOUTH AND SOUTH WEST DISTRICT
District Marine Office
District Chief Surveyor
Spring Place, 105 Commercial Road, Southampton, Hants. SO15 1EG
Tel: 0703 329329

District Sub-Offices
Imperial Buildings, Bar Road, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4NW
Tel: 0326 312761

Phoenix House, Notte Street, Plymouth, Devon PL1 2HF
Tel: 0752 266211

NORTH EAST AND EAST DISTRICT
District Marine Office
District Chief Surveyor
Government Buildings, Broadway West, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE3 2JL
Tel: 091 285 7171

District Sub-Offices
Ground and 3rd Floors, 12-16 Woodlands Road, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS1 3BE
Tel: 0642 246034
Crosskill House, Mill Lane, Beverley, Humberside HU17 9JB
Tel: 0482 866606

NORTH WEST AND WEST DISTRICT
District Marine Office
District Chief Surveyor
2nd Floor, Graeme House, Derby Square, Liverpool, Merseyside L2 75Q.
Tel. 051 471 1142.

District Sub-offices
3rd Floor, Oxford House, The Hayes, Cardiff, South Glamorgan CF1 2TD.
Tel: 0222 229556.
Customs House, Clayton Street, Avonmouth, Bristol, Avon BS1 1DX.
Tel. 0272 822931.
Crown Buildings, Nantucket Avenue, Milford Haven, SA73 2DD.
Tel. 0646 693272.

WEST OF SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND DISTRICT
District Marine Office
Chief Surveyor
6000 Academy Park, Gower Street, Glasgow GS1 1TR.
Tel. 041 427 9400.

District Sub-office
Customs Home, Queens Square, Belfast BT1 3ET.
Tel. 0232 234466.

EAST OF SCOTLAND DISTRICT
District Marine Office
District Surveyor,
Blaikies Quay, Aberdeen AB9 2AZ.
Tel. 0224 574122.

District Sub-offices
1 John's Place, Leith, Edinburgh EH6 7EL.
Tel. 031 554 5488.
The Port Administration Building, Selta Ness, Graven Mossbank, Shetland ZE2 9QR.
Tel. 0806 242 090.

REGISTER OF SHIPPING AND SEAMEN
Unit 12, Cheviot Close, Parc Ty Glas, Llanishen, Cardiff CF4 5FU.
Tel. 0222 747333.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those countries in which the air traffic control service has been privatised.

Mr. Norris: I know of none whose air traffic control service has been fully privatised in the sense that it is wholly or predominantly owned by shareholders or by organisations outside Government. But I understand that Switzerland's air traffic control service—SwissControl—is only partly owned by the Swiss Government. Over the past few years, greater commercialisation has been the trend throughout the world, and, for example, in Germany and New Zealand ATC provision has been removed from the machinery of Government and established in some form of corporate body.

Coastal Shipping

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to increase use of coastal shipping.

Mr. Norris: The choice of transport mode for freight is rightly a commercial decision. However, in July 1991 my Department held a "Roads to Water" seminar to raise awareness of the potential of coastal shipping and inland water transport among freight users.

Following this meeting, two studies were commissioned, one to determine current traffic patterns in the short sea and coastal sectors and to identify the potential for shifting freight from roads to water; the other to consider the interaction between the planning system and the provision and/or retention of waterside freight facilities.

Executive summaries of both studies have been sent to the hon. Member: copies have also been placed in the Library.

Transport Supplementary Grant, North Yorkshire

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the transport supplementary grant settlement for North Yorkshire in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Key: Transport supplementary grant for North Yorkshire in each of the last 10 years have been provided as follows:

Transport Supplementary Grant (net)

Year	*£ million*
1985-86	3·482
1986-87	3·562
1987-88	3·552
1988-89	1·925
1989-90	2·653
1990-91	3·444
1991-92	6·157
1992-93	6·452
1993-94	9·645
1994-95	4·298

Goods Vehicle Operator Licensing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *145*, about the right of local residents to object to the granting of an operator's licence following deregulation, at what point in that process the right will be exercisable.

Mr. Key: The Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill contains no provisions for changing the timing of local residents' exercise of their right to object to the grant of an operator's licence.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *563*, about goods vehicle operators, how he plans to ensure that members of the public know *(a)* the location and *(b)* the function of their local traffic office.

Mr. Key: The address and telephone number of the local traffic area office is given in British Telecom telephone directories under "Department of Transport". The address is also given in the statutory advertisements made by applicants for goods vehicle operator licences.

The function of the traffic area offices is set out in the "Traffic Area Network Annual Report" available from the Traffic Area Co-ordination Division, Department of Transport, Room P2/028, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB. A summary is also published in a "Code of Practice for the Traffic Area Offices", available from each traffic area office.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to market-test the processing of applications for goods and public service vehicle operator licensing; and how he intends to ensure that no unfair advantage is given to certain operators and that the rights of local residents are maintained.

Mr. Key: As part of the Government's "Competing for Quality" programme, we will be considering the feasibility of market-testing or contracting-out the routine processing of applications for operator licences. Contracting out would not affect the requirement for impartiality or the rights of local residents.

Area Budgets

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each traffic area office the budget for running costs this financial year and the budget for the previous financial year.

Mr. Key: The budget figures are as follows:

Traffic area office	*Budget 1993-94 (£)*	*Budget 1994-95 (£)*
North Eastern	1,413,651	1,277,630
North Western	1,579,452	1,534,090
West Midland	1,179,320	1,102,719
Eastern	1,453,827	1,421,599
South Wales	731,113	656,340
Western	1,245,515	1,155,922
South Eastern and Metropolitan	1,406,395	1,369,381
Scottish	1,505,043	1,150,737
Total	10,514,316	9,668,418

Driving Standards Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer on 22 February, *Official Report*, column *116*, whether work on the future of the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency includes the future of the agency; and what considerations underlay the award to him of a bonus for this work.

Mr. Key: I have nothing to add to the answer given on 22 February.

Transport Research Laboratory

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *4*, regarding the hiring of a temporary accountant for the Transport Research Laboratory, who was absent between 5 May 1993 and 27 August 1993, and why.

Mr. Key: During the period 5 May 1993 to 27 August 1993 an existing member of the Transport Research Laboratory staff studying for accountancy qualifications was absent on study leave. In the interim, a fully qualified accountant was hired to cover the period of absence and to assist in the preparation of the first set of commercial accounts for the Transport Research Laboratory. The Transport Research Laboratory did not have the requisite expertise to complete this work in-house.

Trust Ports

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give full details of all European regional development fund moneys paid to trust ports in each of the last three years.

Mr. Norris: This information is not immediately available. It is being gathered and I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications for the payment of European regional development fund funds to *(a)* trust ports, *(b)* former trust ports now privatised and *(c)* trust ports eligible for compulsory privatisation under the Ports Act 1991.

Mr. Norris: Under the present rules, there are no special implications for trust or former trust ports. It is open to them to bid for ERDF funds in the same way as all ports. Their bids, as with all ERDF bids, would be assessed by the appropriate regional committee.

Travel Costs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the last financial year the total costs of travel and subsistence for each of the chief executives in his Department and his permanent under-secretary.

Mr. Norris: Executive agency chief executives incurred the following costs for travel and subsistence in the last financial year:

	£
Driving Standards Agency	4,384·47
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	8,286·00
DVOIT	3,563·67
Vehicle Certification Agency	3,288·67
Vehicle Inspectorate	4,833·00
Transport Research Laboratory	4,565·54

The permanent under-secretary incurred costs of £6,113·05 for travel and subsistence in the last financial year.

Traffic Area Offices

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether agency status for the traffic area offices has been postponed.

Mr. Key: Yes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of the traffic commissioner in the north-west traffic area office next year.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend will consider in due course what arrangements to make for a replacement.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the outcome of the review undertaken of the grading of public inquiry clerks in the traffic area offices; whether his officials will discuss the review with the appropriate trade unions; and if he will place a copy of the review in the Library.

Mr. Key: The Department's internal review concluded that the main duties of the public inquiry clerk clearly fall within the guidelines for the current grading of the post as administrative officer. An element of the duties could be attributed to the executive officer grade but the percentage was insufficient to justify regrading the post.

I would be happy for officials to discuss the results of the review with the Departmental trade unions. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the parliamentary constituencies covered by each traffic area office.

Mr. Key: I will write to the hon. Member.

Coastguard Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff there are in each grade at each Coastguard Agency office; and what is the address of each office.

Mr. Norris: The tables give details of all the coastguard regional offices, maritime rescue co-ordination centres and maritime rescue sub-centres.

In addition, there are 90 sector offices—housing one, or, at the most, two, sector officers. These staff have been included in the relevant MRCC and MRSC figures.

North and East Scotland Regional Office

	Staff Complement
Marine House, Blaikies Quay, Aberdeen AB1 2PB	1×Regional Controller 1×Deputy Regional Controller 1×EO 1×1·5×AO 0·5×Typist
MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE	
Marine House, Blaikies Quay, Aberdeen AB1 2PB	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 8×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 15×Watch Officer
Maritime Rescue Sub Centres	
Cromwell Road, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1LN	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 8×Watch Officer
The Knab, Knab Road, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0AX	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 2×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 8×Watch Officer
Fifeness, Crail, Fife KY10 3XN	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 8×Watch Officer

West of Scotland and Northern Ireland Regional Office

	Staff Complement
Navy Building, Eldon Street, Renfrewshire PA16 7QY	1×Regional Controller 1×Deputy Regional Controller 1×EO 1×1·5×AO 0·5×Typist
MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE	
Navy Building, Eldon Street, Renfrewshire PA16 7QY	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 10×Watch Officer
Maritime Rescue Sub Centres	
Bregenz House, Quay Street, Bangor, County Down BT20 5E	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 9×Watch Officer
Boswell House, Argyll Square, Oban, Argyllshire PA34 4BD	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 3×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 8×Watch Officer
Battery Point, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis PA87 2RT	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 3×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 8×Watch Officer

South West Regional Office

	Staff Complement
Imperial Building, Bar Road, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4NW	1×Regional Controller 1×Deputy Regional Controller 1×EO 1·5×AO 0·5×AA 0·5×Typist 0·5×Messenger
MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE	
Pendennis Point, Castle Drive, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4WZ	1×District Controller 3×Station Officer 5×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 12×Watch Officer
Maritime Rescue Sub Centres	
Kings Quay, Brixham, Devon TQ5 9TW	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 10×Watch Officer
Customs House Quay, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8BE	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 10×Watch Officer

Western Regional Office

	Staff Complement
164-166 Overland Road, Mumbles, Swansea SA3 4EU	1×Regional Controller 1×Deputy Regional Controller 1×EO 1×1·5×AO 0·5×AA
MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE	
Tutt Head, Mumbles, Swansea SA3 4EX	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 7×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 14×Watch Officer

	Staff Complement
Maritime Rescue Sub Centres	
Gorsewood Drive, Hakin, Milford Haven SA73 3ER	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 9×Watch Officer
Prince of Wales Road, Holyhead, Anglesey, Gwynedd LL65 1ET	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 8×Watch Officer
Hall Road West, Crosby, Liverpool L23 8SY	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 5×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 10×Watch Officer

Eastern Regional Office

	Staff Complement
Fifth Floor, Havenbridge House, Great Yarmouth NR30 1HZ	1×Regional Controller 1×Deputy Regional Controller 1×EO 1×1·5×AO 0·5×Typist
MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE	
Fourth Floor, Havenbridge House, Great Yarmouth NR30 1HZ	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 5×Senior Watch Officer 10×Watch Officer
Maritime Rescue Sub Centres	
Lime Kiln Lane, Bridlington, North Humberside YO15 2LX	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 5×Sector Officer 5×Senior Watch Officer 9×Watch Officer
Priory Grounds, North Shields, Tyne and Wear NE30 4DA	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 4×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 9×Watch Officer

South Eastern Regional Office

	Staff Complement
Langdon Battery, Swingate, Dover CT15 5NA	1×Regional Controller 1×Deputy Regional Controller 1×EO 1·5×AO 1×Typist
MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE	
Langdon Battery, Swingate, Dover CT15 5NA	1×District Controller 6×Station Officer 3×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 17×Watch Officer
Maritime Rescue Sub Centres	
East Terrace, Walton-on-Naze, Essex CO14 8PY	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 5×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 9×Watch Officer
Whytecroft House, 44A Marine Parade West, Lee on Solent, Hampshire PO13 9WR	1×District Controller 2×Station Officer 6×Sector Officer 4×Senior Watch Officer 14×Watch Officer

Training Centre

	Staff Complement
Steamer Point, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 4JQ	1×Inspector 1×District Controller 5×Station Officer 1×Sector Officer 1×EO 1×AA 0·5×Typist
Headquarters	
Spring Place, 105, Commercial Road, Southampton SO15 1EG	1×Chief Executive (G4) 4×Directors (1×G5, 3×G6) 3×Inspector 4×District Controller 2×Sector Officer 6×G7 3×SEO 1×SSO 8×HEO 13×EO 12×AO 5·5×AA 3× Secretary 1×Support Manager 3 6×Manager

Executive Agencies

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff at grade 7 and above were employed in each executive agency in his Department in each year since 1989 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Norris: The information, which is expressed as the number of posts, is as follows:

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency was established in 1990 and the figures are:

	Number
1990-91	60·5
1991-92	57·5
1992-93	43·0
1993-94	38·5
Current	34·5

The Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Information Technology Centre was established as an Agency in 1992 and privatised on 17 December 1993. The figures are:

	Number
1992-93	13·7
1993-94	12·0

The Driving Standards Agency was established in 1990 and the figures are:

	Number
1990-91	11
1991-92	12
1992-93	12
1993-94	11
Current	12

The Vehicle Components Agency was established in 1990 and the figures are:

Year	Number
1990-91	6
1991-92	6
1992-93	6
1993-94	7
Current	7

The Vehicle Inspectorate was established in 1989 but figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 could only be made available at disproportionate cost. The subsequent figures are:

Year	Number
1991-92	31
1992-93	29
1993-94	28
Current	27

The Transport Research Laboratory was established in 1992 and the figures are:

Year	Number
1992-93	111·4
1993-94	104·8
Current	104·8

The Highways Agency, the Coastguard Agency and the Marine Safety Agency were all established on 1 April 1994 and the current figures are 347, 17 and 70 respectively.

Bull Bars

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research he has undertaken into the *(a)* extent of bull bar attachments to on-road vehicles, *(b)* their use and *(c)* any danger they pose to pedestrians;

(2) if he will ban the use of bull bars on on-road vehicles; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is his assessment of the danger of bull bars attached to on-road vehicles.

Mr. Key: No research has been undertaken into the extent of the fitment and use of bull bars to road vehicles. However, estimates suggest that about 2 per cent. of new vehicles are being fitted with them.

Impact tests using an instrumented child-size headform on a bull bar have shown that the severity of an impact on a bull bar appears significantly more severe than on a flexible bonnet. We have therefore taken steps to identify accidents where a pedestrian has been struck by a vehicle fitted with a bull bar with a view to determining whether bull bars are causing increased injuries. We do not expect to see results from this exercise before the end of 1994. It would not be sensible to legislate before considering those results.

Staff Surplus, Eastcote

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consult with trade unions over the staff surplus situation at Eastcote.

Mr. Norris: My officials are in touch with the relevant trade unions and will be meeting representatives shortly to discuss the staffing position at Eastcote.

Port Facilities

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve port facilities.

Mr. Norris: The Government's policies towards the commercial ports have created the conditions which enable ports to take full advantage of commercial opportunities and improve their service to the consumer and user. It is for each port to decide what improvement in its port facilities is necessary.

Airlines Information Manual

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the travel information manual used by British and international airlines.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* The travel information manual is published monthly in the Netherlands by a consortium of airlines. I am arranging for a recent edition to be placed in the Library.

Rail Safety

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fires have occurred on *(a)* British Rail and *(b)* Network SouthEast in each month since 1991 and each year since April 1984; and how many of these occurred (i) on rolling stock, (ii) at stations, (iii) on tracks in tunnels, (iv) on open tracks, (v) on escalators, (vi) on lifts and (vii) in other locations.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in the format requested. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate maintains records of railway accidents and casualties. Its records do not differentiate between railway regions.

Railway fire statistics other than fires on trains have only been collated since 1989 and a monthly breakdown is not possible.

Details of railway fires are given in chapter 5 of the "Annual Report on Railway Safety in Great Britain" for each year. Copies are available in the House Library.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give *(a)* the total number of passenger fatalities, *(b)* the total number of serious injuries to passengers and *(c)* the total number of minor injuries to passengers on (i) British Rail and (ii) Network SouthEast for each month since 1991 and each year since 1984, giving for each of the categories the number which occurred in (1) train accidents, (2) accidents through the movement of railway vehicles, (3) accidents on railway premises and (4) trespassers and suicide.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in the format requested. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate maintains records of railway accidents and casualties. Its records do not readily differentiate between railway operators, or regions. Statistics are provided on a yearly cycle and it is not possible to give a breakdown by month.

The table gives the available information.

Passenger Accidents 1984—1992-93

Year	Train accidents			Movement accidents			Non movement accidents		
	Fatals	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	Fatals	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	Fatals	Serious injuries	Minor injuries
1984	18	28	358	21	52	2,348	0	35	3,438
1985	0	31	230	31	42	2,341	2	51	3,467
1986	8	44	298	23	70	2,273	1	55	3,522
1987	3	13	297	36	80	2,609	29	84	3,566
1988	34	75	540	34	102	2,619	1	132	3,903
1989	6	39	272	25	97	2,601	2	132	4,297
1990	0	13	144	37	107	2,551	2	104	3,543
1991-92[1]	2	18	289	53	73	2,181	3	101	3,318
1992-93	0	3	63	26	79	2,335	2	156	3,727

[1] From 1991 statistics have been collated and produced in financial years (April-March).

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many notifiable train accidents have occurred on *(a)* British Rail and *(b)* Network SouthEast in each month since 1991 and in each year since 1984; and how many of these were the result of (i) collisions with buffer stops, (ii) derailments of passenger trains, (iii) derailments of non-passenger trains, (iv) running into obstructions, (v) fires on trains and (vi) other accidents.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in the format requested. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate maintains records of railway accidents and casualties. Its records do not differentiate between railway regions. Statistics are provided on a yearly cycle and it is not possible to give a breakdown by month.

Train accident statistics have been broken down into separate railway operators only since 1988. The table therefore lists all train operator accidents until 1988 and British Rail-only accidents from then on.

Train accidents 1984—1992-93

Year	A Total number of train accidents[1]	B Buffer stop collisions	C Passenger train derailment	D Non passenger train derailment	E Running into obstructions	F Fires on trains	G Other accidents including other collisions
1984	1,359	55	33	197	471	168	435
1985	1,240	60	30	199	440	191	320
1986	1,171	55	34	158	451	174	299
1987	1,164	53	20	172	390	191	338
1988	1,258	58	16	187	457	221	319
1989	1,368	62	23	154	481	271	377
1990	1,230	41	23	154	458	228	326
1991-92[2]	918	28	13	119	328	213	217
1992-93	1,092	23	11	164	520	187	187

[1] The total number of train accidents is made up of Columns B to G.
[2] From 1991 statistics have been collated and produced in financial years (April-March).

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the total number of *(a)* staff and contractor fatalities, *(b)* serious injuries to staff and contractors and *(c)* minor injuries to staff and contractors on (i) British Rail and (ii) Network SouthEast for each month since 1991 and each year since 1984, giving for each of the categories the number which occurred in (1) train accidents, (2) accidents through the movement of railway vehicles (3) accidents on railway premises and (4) trespassers and suicide.

Mr. Roger Freeman: The information is not available in the format requested. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate maintains records of railway accidents and casualties. Its records do not differentiate between railway operators' and contractors' staff, nor do they readily differentiate between railway operators. Statistics are provided on a yearly cycle and it is not possible to give a breakdown by month.

The table gives all the available information.

Staff and contractors accidents 1984—1992-93

Year	Train accidents			Movement accidents			Non movement accidents		
	Fatals	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	Fatals	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	Fatals	Serious injuries	Minor injuries
1984	6	8	60	14	15	58	5	104	2,426
1985	0	9	79	16	37	59	9	120	2,413
1986	5	23	114	8	25	55	3	127	2,564
1987	1	5	60	11	34	50	4	199	2,562
1988	2	6	62	11	36	49	3	231	2,911
1989	6	18	53	8	28	35	4	231	2,770
1990	1	6	67	19	48	68	2	252	2,916
1991-1992[1]	2	6	59	9	39	65	6	233	3,102
1992-1993	1	5	69	5	34	106	5	245	3,173

[1] Since 1991 statistics have been collated and produced in financial years (April-March).

Trespassers and suicides[1]

Year	Killed	Major injuries	Minor injuries
1984	339	79	49
1985	318	90	38
1986	325	93	27
1987	317	82	19
1988	334	85	44
1989	293	72	20
1990	285	96	27
1991-92	242	69	23
1992-93	244	72	17

[1] Does not distinguish between employee/contractor or member of the public.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what specific steps he will take to ensure that in the event of the privatisation of the National Air Traffic Services—NATS—any non-air traffic control regulatory powers remaining with the Civil Aviation Authority do not present a conflict of interest between the CAA's need to reduce costs to itself through contracted-in air traffic services from NATS, and its continuing regulatory responsibilities regarding equipment, procedures and airspace design.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* The detailed regulatory arrangements for NATS, in the event of privatisation, are currently under consideration. The privatised body would be subject to both safety and economic regulation and we will endeavour to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the two. The prime purpose of air traffic control is to ensure the safe and expeditious movement of aircraft—this will not change in the event of privatisation.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to separate air traffic control service provision and regulation by giving consideration to the desirability of transferring the Civil Aviation Authority's air traffic services regulatory function, at present within the remit of the safety regulation group's air traffic services standards department, to the Department of Transport or the Health and Safety Executive or to another independent organisation.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* Our proposal to privatise the national air traffic services is intended, inter alia, to separate air traffic control service provision from the Civil Aviation Authority's regulatory functions. We have no plans to transfer the safety regulation of air traffic services from the Civil Aviation Authority to any other body.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to the maximum number of shares to be held by any single organisation or airline in a privatised National Air Traffic Services.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* I shall be considering this issue in the light of the public consultation currently taking place.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what account was taken in preparing his consultation paper on the privatisation of the National Air Traffic Services of any international experience in the privatisation of air traffic control; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* As far as I am aware, there are no fully privatised air traffic control systems in the usual sense of the word. But over the past few years, greater commercialisation has been the trend throughout the world, and ATC provision has been removed from the machinery of Government and established in some form of corporate body, for example in Portugal, Germany and New Zealand. The decision to go to consultation on the proposal to privatise the National Air Traffic Services was taken in the light of this knowledge, and the proposal itself is a logical extension of the trend towards commercialisation.

M1 (Delays)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost of delays on the M1 during the past 12 months.

Mr. Key: As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, the chief executive will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Greville Janner, dated 20 June 1994:

You recently put down a Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost of delays on the M1 during the past 12 months. As this falls within the Highways Agency's area of responsibility, I have been asked to reply to your question.

We do not have a precise figure for the cost of delays on the M1. There has been no pressing need to obtain one since maintenance works are an essential and continuing task and driven by the commitment to keep the network in a reasonable state of repair. However, a rough estimate of delay costs for the past 12 months is £70M, which represents just over 10 per cent. of the figure for the motorway network as a whole.

In recent years, delay cost figures have increasingly reflected the growing use of incentive (lane rental) contracts which are completed approximately 30 per cent. faster than conventional ones and therefore have a significant effect on reducing disruption. The even greater use of lane rental now (it is currently used for every scheme unless there are technical reasons why it cannot be) is expected to have yet further influence on minimising delays. We know that since the introduction of lane rental in 1984, the saving to road users has been in excess of £120M.

While we do not routinely measure delays at roadworks, we do use a system called 'QUADRO' (QUeues And Delays at ROad works) which estimates the cost of delays and accidents at individual scheme sites. This is used extensively to optimise traffic management arrangements at roadworks.

Considerable effort is made to keep delays on the network to a minimum. Apart from lane rental, some of the measures that have been taken include combining essential maintenance work with motorway widening schemes, together with the greater use of night-time and weekend working, mobile lane closures, narrow lanes and tidal flow systems. And we are constantly reviewing the scope for adding further initiatives to the list.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support and unemployment benefit claimants have *(a)* successfully and *(b)* unsuccessfully claimed income support under the hardship rules for each region, for Great Britain as a whole and for each

quarter since April 1990, showing those whose claim was in doubt due to their (i) not actively seeking work, (ii) refusing suitable employment and (iii) availability for work.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Clare Short, dated 20 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for details of payments made by way of Income Support under the hardship rules.

I have attached information which relates to the period from June 1993. Information prior to this date is already available in the Library (Official Report Vol. 196 Col. 634: Vol. 199 Col. 81: Vol. 208 Cols. 239-240 and Vol. 229 Cols. 1017-1018).

The number of customers who have successfully or unsuccessfully applied for a hardship payment because they have refused suitable employment are included in the number of customers whose claim is in doubt because of their availability for employment. I regret it is not possible to break this figure down.

The information provided has been obtained from the Benefits Agency Management Information Statistics. The figures are based on the Benefits Agency's Territorial structure, which has been in force since 1991.

This information will, in future, be placed on a quarterly basis in the Library. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Territory		*June 1993*	*Sept. 1993*	*Dec. 1993*	*March 1994*
Actively seeking work—hardship applications					
Scotland and Northern	A	21	52	10	113
	R	84	18	16	30
Wales and Central	A	47	69	86	97
	R	37	78	96	149
Southern	A	78	122	55	62
	R	40	155	47	79
National totals	A	146	243	151	272
	R	161	155	159	258

Territory		*June 1993*	*Sept. 1993*	*Dec. 1993*	*March 1994*
Availability for work—hardship applications					
Scotland and Northern	A	86	193	76	97
	R	92	82	82	32
Wales and Central	A	93	124	136	197
	R	73	79	95	113
Southern	A	440	485	533	340
	R	600	711	667	602
National totals	A	619	802	745	643
	R	765	872	844	747

A=Awards.
R=Refusal.

Benefits Office, Lewisham and Brixton

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce play facilities in Lewisham and Brixton district benefit office.

Mr. Burt: The provision of play facilities within benefit offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 20 June 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what plans there are to introduce play facilities in Lewisham and Brixton Offices.

The Benefits Agency is committed to improving the facilities for customers who visit our offices; public areas of offices are being upgraded as funds allow. Managers have the freedom to decide how best to improve facilities for their customers within the available resources.

In the last three years four of the five locations in South Circular District, including Lewisham and Brixton, have been refurbished to provide better facilities for customers. The improvements have taken account of customers' preferences by providing increased privacy, more comfortable seating, carpets, improved facilities for the disabled, a mother and baby room and a television.

A project team has been set up to look at further ways to make improvements including, where space permits, providing designated play areas. There are a number of issues to consider but management hope that within the next twelve to eighteen months they will be able to provide play facilities.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Social Fund

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what checks are made to ensure that claimants, who are signing on as unemployed, do not overpay their *(a)* crisis loans or *(b)* social fund loans.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 20 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what checks are made to ensure that unemployed customers do not overpay their loans from the Social Fund (SF).

I should explain that there are two categories of checks which are made to avoid unemployed customers overpaying their loans; these are automated and clerical.

The automated checks are made via the Social Fund Computer System (SFCS), which replaced microcomputer equipment nearing the end of its potential life and is now fully operational. There are a range of in-built features in SFCS to prevent the over recovery of loans. At every stage of the recovery process case controls ensure that the correct recovery procedure is adhered to. When a date is entered for the commencement of deductions, a date for the cessation of those deductions is automatically set. If this is not done, daily reminders are generated.

In addition to these automated checks there are also locally prescribed clerical checks to keep the system up to date and prevent incorrect levels of recovery. The recovery procedure confirms that the system is operating efficiently and compares the records held on the benefit sections with those on the system. Any discrepancy would be rectified as a result of this procedure.

If, in spite of these procedures an overpayment is made, a refund will be made or, where there is another loan to be repaid, the amount overpaid will be offset against this loan.

I am aware that in some Districts there have been problems where unemployed customers have had deductions made by the Employment Services (ES) and, despite the Benefits Agency being notified by the ES that deductions have ceased, they have continued resulting in an overpayment. The chances of this happening in future will be greatly reduced by a major change to the system, planned for April 1995, which is to automate the interface between SFCS and the Income Support Computer System.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide details of the procedure by

which the social fund budget is allocated to each district; whether such procedure takes into account the demographic constitution of the area; how such procedure affects the allocation; and how a significant number of refugees affects the budget allocation for an area.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Robert Wareing, dated 20 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for information concerning the procedures by which the Social Fund budget is allocated to individual Benefits Agency Districts.

There are three main factors which are taken into account in deciding annual allocations to Districts. These are:

the previous year's budget for the particular District:
the value of awards made by individual Districts in the previous year, plus an estimated value for any application refused on priority grounds; and
the District's share of the national income Support caseload, weighted by client group.

The combination of these three factors help to ensure that budgets reflect the individual circumstances of each District. Ministers decided that for 1994-95 all District budgets for grants and loans should be increased by 2% and this increase added to the underlying baseline budgets set previously by reference to the factors mentioned above.

District Managers are asked to plan their budgets for the year ahead, and are encouraged to consider the possibility of unforeseen expenditure, such as an increase in applications from particular groups of customers. Aside from these local contingency arrangements, there are also national procedures to help Districts facing excessive budgetary pressures which could not have been anticipated by Managers' earlier planning.

Since the Fund was introduced in 1988, these national contingency procedures have been used to provide additional help to Districts on a number of occasions.

The most recent example of this was extra funding made available to the North Wales Coast District to help victims of flooding. Additional allocations have also been made to assist with a local increase in applications caused by, for example, an influx of refugees from other countries to individual Districts. Such allocations are based upon information provided by Districts.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what provision exists so that applicants for the disability living allowance who have had their application rejected are informed of their right to appeal;

(2) what steps are taken to ensure the appropriate competence of adjudication officers who assess claimants for the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) asking about (i) information given to customers on the right to appeal, and (ii) the steps taken to ensure the appropriate level of competence of Adjudication Officers.

I should first of all explain that when notification of the decision of an Adjudication Officer is sent out to a customer, an information sheet accompanies it. Amongst other information, reference to a right of review is made, in the event of disallowance of an initial claim to DLA. Similarly, following an unsuccessful review of a contested decision on a claim customers are advised of their entitlement to an appeal. I have enclosed for your attention copies of the pertinent narratives detailing the information given to customers.

Adjudication officers are independent of the Department and make decisions based on evidence and the law. Monitoring is carried out by the Central Adjudication Service (CAS) on behalf of the Chief Adjudication Officer. Accuracy figures are routinely collected and published and Adjudication Officers are given ongoing support and training to ensure that decision making is informed and consistent.

In addition to the monitoring performed by CAS the Disability Living Allowance Unit (DLAU) has an Adjudication Checking and Advice Team (ACAT) which also acts as a monitor. Customer complaints, difficulties and suggestions together with staff suggestions, the results of monitoring and other quality initiatives to lift service are fed into training as a matter of course.

The DLAU are in the process of reviewing the role of ACAT. The team is to be increased in size and its remit extended to address issues raised both internally and externally.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many letters he has received on the subject of beggars in the last three months.

Mr. Burt: Statistics are not kept on the numbers of letters concerning beggars.

Incomes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current take-up rate of income support by those potentially eligible to claim in the 55 to 65-year age group for *(a)* men and *(b)* women.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the precise form requested. Estimates of the take-up of income support are available for pensioners and non-pensioner family types and can be found in "Income Related Benefits —Estimates of Take-up in 1990 and 1991" published earlier this year, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the projected average income for single pensioners *(a)* male and *(b)* female between 1994 and 2000; and what estimate he has made of average income for full-time employment in the same time period.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available.

Availability-for-work Rules

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list changes made in the availability-for-work rules for each year since 1979; and how many claimants were so affected.

Mr. Burt: There has been no major change since 1979 to the long-standing basic condition that all those claiming benefits for unemployment must be immediately available for work. Various concessions to the availability rules and changes in the groups who are exempt from satisfying this condition have been made. These, excluding minor and textual changes, are as follows:

Changes to the availability for work rules in unemployment benefit legislation

1982

A person undertaking duties in an emergency deemed to be available, (SI 1982-96).

A person attending workcamps deemed to be available for a maximum of 14 days, (SI 1982-96).

A person engaged in providing a service deemed to be available if ready to accept employment or attend an interview at not less than 24 hours notice, (SI 1982-96).

1988

Availability may be deemed in the period between a doubt arising on availability and a decision by the adjudication officer in cases where Unemployment Benefit is already in payment, (SI 1988/689).

1989

Onus of proof placed on the claimant to show he has reasonable prospects of obtaining employment given his stated restrictions on his availability, (SI 1989/1324).

1993

A person providing a service as a "volunteer" deemed to be available if ready to accept employment or attend an interview at not less than 48 hours notice, (SI 1993/1754).

Changes to exemptions from the requirement to be available for employment as a condition of entitlement to Supplementary Benefit/Income Support

1980

Start of regulated scheme, (previously Supplementary Benefits Commission had wide powers and issued written guidance to local officers), (SI 1980/1586).

1981

Men over 60 but below pension age who would otherwise be entitled to the long-term rate of normal requirements exempted, (SI 1981/1526.

1982

People who worked part-time by reason of some disease or disablement were exempted, (SI 1982/907).

A person remanded in custody or committed in custody for trial or to be sentenced exempted, (SI 1982/907).

The exemption for those in specified circumstances in relevant education (for example where the claimant had the care of a dependent child or where there was no parent and nobody acting in the place of a parent) was extended to 19 year olds in non advanced education, (SI 1982/907).

1983

All men over 60 exempted, (SI 1983/463).

Those caring for a member of the assessment unit who was temporarily sick with no alternative means of care exempted, (SI 1983/1000).

1987

An exemption extended to those in relevant education living away from parents or a guardian who were unable to support him financially, (SI 1987/358).

1988

Introduction of Income Support, (SI 1987/1967).

Removal of discretion to exempt those whose circumstances were "analogous" to those prescribed as being exempt, (SI 1987/1967).

A member of a couple looking after children while the other partner is temporarily abroad exempted, (SI 1988/1228).

1990

Students within the definition of "deaf" for educational grant purposes exempt, (SI 1990/1657).

Exemption extended to people accompanying children abroad for medical treatment, (SI 1990/547).

1991

A carer became exempt in the eight weeks after ceasing to meet the exemption criteria (e.g. after the death of the person for whom they were caring), (SI 1991/1559).

1991

Exemption extended to those living in residential care and nursing homes engaged in some employment, (SI 1991/1559).

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of severe disablement allowance receive an increase of benefit for *(a)* an adult dependant and *(b)* child dependants; and what is the average number of children per claimant.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table.

	Number
Number of Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) beneficiaries receiving an adult dependency increase	4,000
Number of SDA beneficiaries receiving a child dependency increase (CDI)	2,000
Average number of children per SDA beneficiary receiving one or more CDIs	1·6

Source: 1 per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain as at 4 April 1992, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average amount of housing benefit payable to people in full-time work;

(2) what is the average amount of council tax benefit payable to people in full-time work.

Mr. Hague: In Great Britain, in May 1992, the latest date for which information is available, the average weekly amount of housing benefit for cases without income support, where there was earned income, was £25·02. Information for council tax benefit is not available.

Data source:

The May 1992 Housing Benefit Management Information System annual one per cent. sample of cases.

Notes:

1. Claimants in receipt of Income Support cannot be in full time work, so have been excluded.
2. Information on the number of hours worked is not collected, the information therefore includes any case where either a claimant and/or partner receives earnings.
3. The information refers to benefit units, these may be a single person or a couple.
4. As the information is from a sample taken at a specific point it cannot be taken to represent the whole year.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average amount of council tax benefit payable to people who also receive *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit and *(c)* severe disablement allowance;

(2) what is the average amount of housing benefit payable to people who also receive (i) unemployment benefit, (ii) invalidity benefit and (iii) severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Hague: In Great Britain, in May 1992, the latest date for which information is available, the average amount of housing benefit payable to persons in receipt of unemployment benefit, invalidity benefit and severe disablement allowance was £34·25, £25·43 and £32·18 respectively. Information for council tax benefit is not available.

Data Source:

The Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample and the Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry of May 1992.

Notes:

1. The information refers to benefit units, these may be a single

person or a couple.
2. Cases selected include those where either the claimant or the partner were in receipt of any of the benefits.
3. Some cases may fall into more than one category; eg a claimant may receive Unemployment Benefit and the partner Invalidity Benefit.
4. The information excludes all cases where Housing Benefit entitlement is less than 50 pence per week.
5. As the information is from a sample taken at a specific point it cannot be taken to represent the whole year.
6. The information for Unemployment Benefit uses a different analysis from that published in Social Security Statistics.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people now receive severe disablement allowance; and how many receive age allowances *(a)* at the higher rate, *(b)* at the middle rate and *(c)* at the lower rate.

Mr. Scott: As at 4 April 1992, the latest year for which actual figures are available, there were 302,000[1] recipients of severe disablement allowance. The numbers entitled to the higher, middle and lower rate age allowances were 204,000[1], 52,000[1] and 45,000[1] respectively. We estimate that as at April 1993 there were 313,000[2] recipients of severe disablement allowance.

Sources:
[1] One per cent. sample of claimants for Great Britain rounded to the nearest thousand.
[2] Social Security Departmental Report published in March 1994.

State Pensions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has for the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women reaching retirement age in (i) 2000, (ii) 2005, (iii) 2010 and (iv) 2020 who will not qualify for a full basic state pension.

Mr. Hague: The data held are insufficient to allow reliable estimates to be made in the form requested.

At present, approximately 90 per cent. of men reaching state pension age have underlying entitlement to a full category A basic retirement pension based on their own contributions. This proportion is not expected to alter significantly in the future. The equivalent position for women is that approximately 20 per cent. currently have underlying entitlement to a full category A retirement pension. By 2020, this proportion is expected to increase to between half and two thirds.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been received since 13 September 1993 for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema; how many claims were successful; how many claimants were refused benefit because of failing *(a)* the breathing capacity test and *(b)* the category 1 pneumoconiosis test; and if he will break down the figures by social security district.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. The table gives the information by Benefits Agency area directorate as at 12 June 1994—not all the claims received would have been decided by that date:

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema (PD D12) by Area Directorate

Area	*Claims received*	*Disallowed on employment grounds (a)*	*Disallowed on medical grounds (b)*	*Assessed at 14 per cent. or over disabled (c)*
South				
Anglia	24	4	4	3
Chilterns	22	5	3	0
South East	446	28	299	31
West Country	146	8	41	4
Wales and Central England				
East Midlands	5,292	103	3,722	444
Greater Manchester	312	13	216	27
Lancashire and Cumbria	2,160	110	1,350	119
Merseyside	472	21	324	34
Midlands South West	623	26	440	47
Wales	8,614	525	5,362	1,134
West Mercia	3,516	174	2,239	316
Scotland and North				
East Scotland	2,354	78	1,831	84
Glasgow	232	12	92	8
North and West Yorkshire	2,498	80	1,738	327
North, Central and West Scotland	1,862	79	1,471	49
South Yorkshire and Humberside	6,261	139	4,304	655
Tyne Tees	6,873	133	5,510	514
Grand Total	41,707	1,538	28,946	3,796

(a) Claims disallowed where the customer had not worked underground in a coal mine for a period of at least 20 years.
(b) Claims disallowed on medical advice include—customers with insufficient lung function loss; those where category 1 pneumoconiosis has not been diagnosed, and those where chronic bronchitis and/or emphysema has not been diagnosed.
(c) Claims assessed at 14 per cent. or more will result in an award of benefit.
Footnote: Not all claims received would have been decided by 12 June 1994.
Based on a 100 per cent. count and subject to amendment.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the compensation recovery unit will take money away from asbestosis victims who have successfully pursued their claims in the civil courts;

(2) in what circumstances *(a)* the mining industry and *(b)* other industries are liable to compensation recovery unit deductions where victims of industrial disease have successfully made claims for compensation;

(3) what are the circumstances in which terminally ill people face recovery of court awards from the compensation recovery unit; and what diseases are covered by the rules.

Mr. Scott: Under the provisions of the compensation recovery scheme, an amount equivalent to the value of relevant benefits paid in consequence of asbestosis or other disease, accident or injury should be deducted if the compensation award exceeds £2,500.

The scheme applies to all types of industry and the provisions make no distinction between claims made in the civil courts and out-of-court settlements, nor between types of disease.

Compensation claims from people who are terminally ill may also be affected, but the legislation prescribes certain exempt cases, including payments made under the terms of the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme operated by agreement between British Coal and the mining unions.

D. Gale

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action has been taken to ensure that the decisions of the Independent Tribunal Service with reference to the appeal of D. Gale (NR158681C) are communicated promptly to the local offices.

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, his honour Judge Thorpe. He will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his best estimate of the cost of the one per cent. addition currently paid to the holders of appropriate personal pensions aged 30 years or over in a full year.

Mr. Hague: The cost was estimated to be around £165 million for a full year in the financial memorandum accompanying the Social Security Act 1993, which introduced this measure. There is as yet no evidence to suggest that this estimate needs to be revised.

Severe Hardship Payments

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds applied for severe hardship payments; and how many were granted for each quarter since 1988.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table. More than one application may be made by the same individual until a job or youth training place is secured.

Applications for severe hardship payments

	Total number of applications	*Successful*
September 1988 to November 1988	1,688	1,139
December 1988 to February 1989	2,370	1,465
March 1989 to May 1989	4,506	2,963
June 1989 to August 1989	5,362	3,556
September 1989 to November 1989	4,278	2,877
December 1989 to February 1990	5,448	3,721
March 1990 to May 1990	6,827	4,663
June 1990 to August 1990	7,470	5,326
September 1990 to November 1990	7,023	5,240
December 1990 to February 1991	8,722	6,574
March 1991 to May 1991	12,478	9,665
June 1991 to August 1991	15,112	12,210
September 1991 to November 1991	16,478	13,231
December 1991 to February 1992	19,697	16,537
March 1992 to May 1992	24,197	19,959
June 1992 to August 1992	28,114	23,085
September 1992 to November 1992	26,966	21,551
December 1992 to February 1993	31,135	25,715
March 1993 to May 1993	37,351	31,700
June 1993 to August 1993	37,256	32,415
September 1993 to November 1993	31,491	27,557
December 1993 to February 1994	34,397	30,395

Source: Severe Hardship Claims Unit database.

Home Responsibilities Protection

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women currently earning less than the lower earnings limit; and, of these, how many are covered by the home responsibilities protection scheme.

Mr. Hague: It is estimated that 0·9 million men and 2·3 million women earn less than the lower earnings limit in any week. The number of these covered by the home responsibilities protection scheme is not known but those who satisfy the normal conditions for caring have access to the scheme.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces (Young People)

15. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many young people under the age of 18 years are currently serving in Her Majesty's forces.

Mr. Hanley: As at 1 July 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 3,334 young people under the age of 18 serving in the armed forces.

"Front Line First"

16. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications of his "Front Line First" policy for *(a)* 24 Air Mobile Brigade and *(b)* the Army garrison at Colchester.

Mr. Hanley: As we have said previously, we hope to make an announcement about the broad outcome of the "Front Line First" studies before the summer recess.

My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that as part of the additional front-line manpower for the Army announced in December last year we intend to make available an additional battery of 83 men for the 24 Airmobile Brigade Artillery regiment.

Defence Exports

17. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on defence exports.

Mr. Aitken: I am pleased to report that 1993 was another record year, with British defence equipment manufacturers winning export orders worth £6,600 million. This maintains the United Kingdom's position as the world's second largest supplier of defence equipment.

22. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the contribution of defence industries to British exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: 1993 was another record year for British defence equipment manufacturers who won export orders worth £6,600 million. This represents 5·45 per cent. of total British exports in 1993.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

18. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart in respect of the deployment of military forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Rifkind: I have regular discussions with my French counterpart on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Trident

19. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the most up-to-date estimates of the capital cost of completing the Trident missile programme and maintaining it thereafter.

Mr. Aitken: At the end of December 1993, some £7 billion had been spent on the Trident programme out of a total of some £9·9 billion, with future estimated capital expenditure expressed at current economic conditions. Operating costs over the lifetime of Trident are expected to amount to some £6 billion on the same basis. The latter figure includes the costs of manpower, submarine refits, transport, stores, an appropriate element of the costs of the Clyde submarine base and the atomic weapons establishment and the eventual decommissioning of the submarines.

Hercules (Replacement)

20. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the replacement of the Hercules.

Mr. Aitken: We plan to replace or refurbish about half the Hercules fleet on a rolling basis by the end of the century. The balance of the Hercules fleet will be considered later, alongside the possible replacement of other RAF transport aircraft.

Peace Dividend

21. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made as to the extent of to which the peace dividend has now been exhausted.

Mr. Hanley: "Peace dividend" is not a term that my Department uses, because peace itself is a dividend from a continuous investment of national and international resources. In the face of continuing uncertainty in the strategic setting, the Government's security and defence policies aim both to meet existing and future challenges in the most effective way possible, and to make a suitable contribution to peace and stability worldwide, with the purpose of maintaining the freedom and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom and its dependent territories and its ability to pursue legitimate interests at home and abroad. The proportion of national resources which will be required to meet these goals cannot be predicted absolutely. On present plans, defence expenditure is expected to be about 2·9 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1996-97.

Defence Costs Study

23. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what closures of Ministry of Defence sites in the midlands the defence costs study is considering.

Mr. Aitken: A number of recommendations have emerged from the defence costs study for the rationalisation of various defence sites throughout the country. These are still under consideration by Ministers. Until final decisions are taken it would be premature for me to comment on the detail of the options under consideration.

Procurement

24. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to conduct a review of his Department's procurement plans.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's procurement plans are kept under review to ensure that they will continue to sustain cost-effectively the military capabilities that our policies require.

Contractorisation

25. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the contractorisation programme in the armed services.

Mr. Aitken: Following the issue in 1991 of the Government's White Paper, "Competing for Quality", we have a programme to pursue market-testing opportunities worth £1·2 billion in the four years from April 1992 across the whole range of defence activities. The aim of the programme is to test the efficiency of in-house services and functions against competition from industry, thereby maximising value for money for the defence budget and the taxpayer. The recent defence costs study will inevitably have a significant impact on the scale of our future "Competing for Quality" programme, and decisions on the contents of the programme will be taken in the light of the outcome of the study.

Hydrographical Surveys

26. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of hydrographic surveys is undertaken by the Royal Navy's marine surveying section.

Mr. Hanley: About two thirds of the civil programme of nautical charting hydrographic surveys in national waters is carried out by Royal Navy personnel embarked in

ships of the Hydrographic Surveying Squadron or in chartered vessels. The Navy has only limited involvement in hydrographic surveys outside national waters.

Contracts

27. **Mr. Ames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of United Kingdom defence contracts have been awarded to United Kingdom companies in the past 12 months.

Mr. Aitken: United Kingdom-based companies have been awarded some 90 per cent., by value, of the direct contracts placed by my Department in the last 12 months.

Ten Tors Competition

28. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the manning levels of the Regular Army and the Territorial Army in the 10 tors competition held on Saturday 14 May on Dartmoor.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 74 Regular Army personnel and 289 members of the Territorial Army took part in the 10 tors competition on 14 May.

Merchant Vessels

29. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many merchant vessels are currently available to the United Kingdom for defence purposes.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) earlier today.

Territorial Army

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of formed Territorial Army units to the Falklands or other overseas theatres.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 19 April at column *508* our intention to deploy a Territorial Army platoon in support of the Regular Army in the Falkland Islands from July to November this year, and a Territorial Army company as part of the Falkland Islands garrison from March to July next year. We shall consider further developments in the light of this trial. The 40 TA personnel deploying next month are drawn from across the Province, and come from 4/5 Royal Irish Rangers and 152 Ambulance Regiment RLC.

Defence Procurement Executive

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the list kept by the Defence Procurement Executive of approved persons or companies in the United Kingdom to whom surplus military equipment may be disposed.

Mr. Aitken: More than 4,000 companies and individuals encompassing more than 250 commodity types are currently registered on the Directorate of Sales (Disposals) trade lists. The information is commercial in confidence and can be released only with permission of the tenderers concerned.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries to which surplus military equipment has been disposed by the Defence Procurement Executive in the last five years for which information is available.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested could not be provided without disproportionate effort. However, overseas sales of surplus military equipment by the Ministry of Defence are subject to the same defence and foreign policy considerations as all other exports of defence equipment.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are used for the disposal of surplus military equipment by the Defence Procurement Executive.

Mr. Aitken: Surplus military equipment is sold by the Directorate of Sales (Disposals) to the best financial advantage of the Ministry of Defence, in compliance with Government policies and control procedures.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many persons and at what grades or ranks work in the Defence Procurement Executive.

Mr. Aitken: The available information, relating to staff working in Chief of Defence Procurement's budget area at 1 April 1994, is as follows:

Permanent United Kingdom-based civilian staff—full-time equivalent numbers by grade equivalence

	Total administration group		*Scientists/engineers*	*Other staff*
Total	9,660·0	3,237·5	4,333·0	2,089·5
Non-industrial Total	8,235·5	3,237·5	4,333·0	665·0
Grade 1	1·0	0·0	1·0	0·0
Grade 2	2·0	1·0	1·0	0·0
Grade 3	12·0	6·0	6·0	0·0
Grade 4	8·0	4·0	4·0	0·0
Grade 5	80·0	36·0	38·0	6·0
Grade 6	181·5	55·0	125·5	1·0
Grade 7	672·0	134·0	516·0	22·0
SBO and equivalent	1,563·5	287·0	1,242·5	34·0
HBO and equivalent	2,099·0	467·0	1,553·0	79·0
EO and equivalent	1,667·0	745·5	803·5	118·0
AO and equivalent	1,330·5	1,110·5	42·5	177·5
AA and equivalent	615·0	391·5	0·0	223·5
Other—				
industrials on temporary promotion	4·0	—	—	4·0

	Total administration group		Scientists/engineers	Other staff
Industrial total	1,424·5	—	—	1,424·5
Apprentices	173·0	—	—	173·0
Basic craftsmen	22·0	—	—	22·0
Senior craftsmen	608·5	—	—	608·5
Industrial Technician	45·0	—	—	45·0
Fire Service	47·0	—	—	47·0
Other Non-craft	529·0	—	—	529·0
United Kingdom regular service personnel				
Total	1,224	—	—	—
Officers	840	—	—	—
Other ranks	384	—	—	—

Royal Air Force

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he expects the level of manpower in the Royal Air Force to be in 1999.

Mr. Hanley: Detailed manpower requirements in five years' time will depend on a number of factors, including changing commitments, developments in technology and the progress of management initiatives such as market testing. The Royal Air Force estimates, however, that once restructuring following the "Options for Change" review has been completed, its broad requirement for manpower will be 64,500, which assumes 4,500 in initial training. The precise number in initial training will depend upon recruiting and outflow at the time.

These figures reflect decisions already taken. They do not take account of any changes in manpower which may arise as a result of the defence costs study.

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals his Department has to fit flight data recorders or cockpit voice recorders to Chinook helicopters; and what would be the costs involved in purchasing and fitting flight data recorders and cockpit voice recorder equipment.

Mr. Aitken: A programme to fit a health and usage monitoring system which incorporates an accident data recorder and a cockpit voice recorder is planned to start in 1997. We expect to issue, next year, an invitation to tender for the supply of this equipment, at which time industry will be asked to provide costed proposals.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals his Department has to fit ground proximity warning systems to Chinook helicopters; and what would be the cost of fitting and purchasing such equipment.

Mr. Aitken: There are no current proposals or costings available to equip Chinook with a ground proximity warning system. All RAF Chinooks are, however, fitted with radar altimeters.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings were held by Ministers, serving officers and officials with General Pinochet during his recent visit to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: None.

Officers (Cooks)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) *Official Report*, column *534*, what is the annual cost for each service of providing cooks for serving officers.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Legg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to visit Brussels to meet his NATO counterparts in order to discuss future peacekeeping operations.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence plans to visit Brussels to speak to his NATO counterparts at the Defence Planning Committee meeting in December. The agenda for that meeting has not yet been decided.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under which section of the Official Secrets Act 1989 he withholds data on energy efficiency within his responsibility.

Mr. Hanley: It is not my Department's policy to withhold data on energy efficiency. Because of the major organisational changes in the Department in recent years, however, it was not possible to provide full sets of figures in time for the first two editions of the Department of the Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance". The 1994 edition will, however, have details for each year of the current Government campaign, for each of the three services, and we hope to be able to give complete data in the subsequent edition.

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. Hanley: No specific instructions are issued to security staff in my Department's London buildings for

dealing with those sleeping rough and beggars, but in the light of the continuing terrorist threat it is our policy to ensure that perimeters of buildings are kept clear at all times. Records are not maintained of specific incidents, but it is the policy of my Department's security staff to seek the assistance of the police where there is a problem.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *306*, what was the conclusion of the discussions on the 1980s United States plans to update their offensive chemical capability; and what were the factors behind reaching this conclusion.

Mr. Hanley: Throughout the discussions in question, the United Kingdom placed the highest priority on the negotiation of a verifiable and comprehensive worldwide ban on chemical weapons. However, faced with the Soviet Union's formidable offensive capability in chemical warfare and its persistent refusal to accept adequate verification measures to permit such a ban, the United Kingdom supported the USA's moves to modernise its limited retaliatory chemical capability. This modernisation was adopted by NATO as a force goal but was subsequently cancelled by the United States in 1991. As was stated at the time, this underlined to the Soviet Union the benefits of an early agreement on a negotiated ban.

This ban is now in sight in the form of the chemical weapons convention which opened for signature in January 1993.

Suez

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the campaign, gallantry or other medals available to ex-service people who served during the Suez emergency in Egypt.

Mr. Hanley: One day's service in the Suez emergency in Egypt between 31 October 1956 and 22 December 1956 qualified for the award of the clasp "Near East" to the Naval General Service Medal or the General Service Medal 1918 Army and RAF. Between the above dates, naval personnel serving in ships engaged in operations off the Egyptian coast, and aircrew who completed one sortie over the operational land area in Egypt, also qualified for the clasp "Near East".

Service personnel who served during that emergency could also be considered for awards in respect of gallant and distinguished services. A list of those personnel granted awards was published in the *London Gazette* supplement of 13 June 1957.

WALES

Church Repairs

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to fulfil his departmental commitment to discuss with Church authorities in Wales the need for repair grants arising from damage caused by atmospheric polluters.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Cadw has held discussions with Church authorities in Wales about support for general repairs to cathedrals. In my reply of 16 March to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), *Official Report*, column *698*, I announced that over the next three financial years £675,000 will be set aside towards the restoration costs faced by Welsh cathedrals. This is additional to and separate from existing support for repairs to historic religious buildings, which totalled £557,331 in 1993-94.

Dentists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the number of salaried dentists employed in each family health services authority area on 24 March, together with the number of community dentists employed within the same areas;

(2) what was the number of *(a)* general dental practitioners practising, *(b)* general dental practitioners' practices, *(c)* community dental practitioners and *(d)* salaried dental practitioners for each family health services authority area for each year since 1984; and if he will also explain these figures per 1,000 of the population resident in each FHSA area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information relating to general dental practitioners and community dental staff is given in the table. Information relating to community dental staff is collected annually as at 30 September. Therefore, no information relating to 24 March is available centrally.

The table also gives the number of salaried dentists in post at 30 September 1993 and 30 April 1994 respectively. No salaried dentists were employed prior to 1993. The table includes one dentist, in Powys, who was not in post on 24 March 1994.

No information is held centrally on the number of general dental practitioners' practices.

Family Health Service Authority Area
Clwyd

	Number	*[1]Rate*
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	84	21·2
1985	87	21·9
1986	87	21·8
1987	97	24·1
1988	99	24·4
1989	108	26·4
1990	111	27·1
1991	105	25·4
1992	102	24·6
1993	114	27·5
1994	119	28·7
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	13·8	3·5
1985	13·1	3·3
1986	13·3	3·3
1987	12·9	3·2
1988	13·4	3·3
1989	10·9	2·7
1990	12·2	3·0
1991	11·8	2·9
1992	10·6	2·6
1993	10·4	2·5
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	—	—
1994	—	—

Family Health Service Authority Area
Dyfed

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	77	23·1
1985	80	24·0
1986	83	24·7
1987	89	26·2
1988	91	26·4
1989	96	27·6
1990	98	28·1
1991	101	28·9
1992	105	29·9
1993	104	29·6
1994	104	29·6
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	15·4	4·6
1985	14·6	4·4
1986	15·3	4·5
1987	13·6	4·0
1988	16·2	4·7
1989	14·2	4·1
1990	14·2	4·1
1991	13·7	3·9
1992	12·5	3·6
1993	12·6	3·6
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	1	0·3
1994	1	0·3

Family Health Service Authority Area
Gwent

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	107	24·4
1985	109	24·8
1986	107	24·2
1987	114	25·8
1988	116	26·1
1989	123	27·6
1990	125	28·0
1991	139	31·0
1992	135	30·0
1993	135	30·0
1994	142	31·6
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	20·0	4·6
1985	19·0	4·3
1986	18·2	4·1
1987	20·7	4·7
1988	18·3	4·1
1989	16·4	3·7
1990	16·3	3·6
1991	15·7	3·5
1992	15·5	3·4
1993	14·1	3·1
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	—	—
1994	—	—

Family Health Service Authority Area
Gwynedd

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	62	26·7
1985	65	27·9
1986	65	27·8
1987	66	28·1
1988	63	26·5
1989	66	27·6
1990	69	28·8
1991	65	27·2
1992	66	27·5
1993	67	27·9
1994	66	27·5
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	13·8	5·9
1985	13·1	5·6
1986	12·6	5·4
1987	10·2	4·3
1988	9·6	4·0
1989	8·9	3·7
1990	9·1	3·8
1991	8·8	3·7
1992	9·5	4·0
1993	8·3	3·5
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	1	0·4
1994	2	0·8

Family Health Service Authority Area
Mid Glamorgan

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	118	22·1
1985	119	22·3
1986	121	22·6
1987	130	24·3
1988	131	24·4
1989	135	25·1
1990	134	24·8
1991	123	22·7
1992	133	24·5
1993	126	23·2
1994	122	22·5
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	18·7	3·5
1985	17·7	3·3
1986	17·7	3·3
1987	19·5	3·6
1988	20·9	3·9
1989	18·9	3·5
1990	18·9	3·5
1991	18·3	3·4
1992	16·9	3·1
1993	9·0	1·7
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	—	—
1994	—	—

Family Health Service Authority Area
Powys

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	25	22·6
1985	30	27·0
1986	32	28·5
1987	34	30·1
1988	35	30·6
1989	34	29·2
1990	34	29·1
1991	36	30·4
1992	35	29·4
1993	34	28·5
1994	32	26·8
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	8·3	7·5
1985	7·9	7·1

	Number	[1]Rate
1986	8·0	7·1
1987	7·9	7·0
1988	7·0	6·1
1989	6·2	5·3
1990	7·0	6·0
1991	7·0	5·9
1992	7·0	5·9
1993	5·0	4·2
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	—	—
1994	1	0·8

Family Health Service Authority Area
South Glamorgan

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	125	31·7
1985	129	32·7
1986	125	31·6
1987	127	31·9
1988	130	32·3
1989	132	32·8
1990	131	32·3
1991	129	31·6
1992	127	30·9
1993	133	32·4
1994	135	32·9
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	15·5	3·9
1985	14·7	3·7
1986	13·8	3·5
1987	9·8	2·5
1988	16·7	4·2
1989	16·8	4·2
1990	16·2	4·0
1991	15·4	3·8
1992	16·2	3·9
1993	15·5	3·8
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	—	—
1994	—	—

Family Health Service Authority Area West Glamorgan

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	116	31·6
1985	123	33·5
1986	120	32·7
1987	123	33·5
1988	133	36·1
1989	133	36·1
1990	135	36·5
1991	134	36·1
1992	128	34·5
1993	130	35·0
1994	138	37·2
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	13·7	3·7
1985	13·0	3·5
1986	11·8	3·2
1987	11·8	3·2
1988	11·8	3·2
1989	11·5	3·1
1990	12·3	3·3
1991	11·9	3·2
1992	11·8	3·2
1993	11·8	3·2

	Number	[1]Rate
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	—	—
1994	—	—

Family Health Service Authority Area
Wales

	Number	[1]Rate
General dental practitioners[2]		
1984	714	25·4
1985	742	26·4
1986	740	26·2
1987	780	27·5
1988	798	28·0
1989	827	28·8
1990	837	29·1
1991	832	28·8
1992	831	28·7
1993	843	29·1
1994	858	29·6
Community dental practitioners[3]		
1984	119·3	4·3
1985	113·1	4·0
1986	110·7	3·9
1987	106·4	3·8
1988	113·9	4·0
1989	103·8	3·6
1990	106·2	3·7
1991	102·6	3·5
1992	100·0	3·5
1993	86·6	3·0
Salaried dental practitioners[4]		
1993	2	0·1
1994	4	0·1

[1] Per 100,000 resident population.
[2] General Dental Practitioners (head count) treating NHS patients at 30 September except for 1994 when figures are at 30 April.
[3] Staff in the community dental service (whole-time equivalents) at 30 September.
[4] Staff in post (head count) at 30 September 1993 and 30 April 1994.

Medical and Surgical Negligence

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds his Department has available for statutory or non-statutory contingent liabilities for claims of medical or surgical negligence when liability may be split between two NHS hospital trusts.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The excess costs above £30,000 of successful claims arising from clinical negligence are met from a pool, administered by the Welsh Office, which has a present provision of £3,000,000.

Where liability is split between NHS trusts, it is a matter for local determination how the first £30,000 of such a claim is met.

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff are employed by the Royal Commission on ancient and historical monuments (Wales); and what is their average annual salary.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Wales) has 34·5 full-time equivalent staff in post. Their average annual salary is £23,555.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance that he issues to GP fundholding practices on the insurance cover that they should carry for claims of negligence made for the placing of inappropriate contracts.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is no intention to issue guidance to GP fundholders on the insurance cover that they should carry. All general practitioners are responsible for making their own arrangements to cover insurance risks.

A-level Results

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on A-level results achieved in *(a)* Welsh colleges and *(b)* Welsh secondary school sixth forms in 1993.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on A-level pass rates is not immediately available by type of institution, but it will be possible to provide it before the end of the year.

As soon as the data are to hand, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales asked for grant-maintained status in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Seven schools applied for grant-maintained status in 1993. There have been no applications in 1994 to date.

Cwmcarn Grant-maintained School

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when Cwmcarn grant-maintained school applied to establish a sixth form; and what was the result of this application.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have not received an application from the school to establish a sixth form. I understand, however, that the school is currently consulting on proposals for a change of character as required by section 96 of the Education Act 1993.

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has received on the number of employees in each NHS trust who would lose their jobs following the implementation of the current pay award.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is impossible to say to what extent any speculative figures for job losses in the trusts are directly attributable to the cost of pay awards.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had regarding the payment of salary to the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency by any other method other than pay-as-you-earn.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 June 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each category in the last three months.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No formal instructions are given to security staff for dealing with those sleeping rough in departmental doorways or beggars in the vicinity. It is, however, normal practice for security staff to ask those sleeping rough in departmental doorways to move at the start of the working day if they have not already done so. No problems with either category have been reported within the last three months.

Katyn

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will now review the withholding of eight of the 762 entered papers on files FO 371/34563-90, following the information about Katyn made available by the Russian Government on 14 October 1992.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Seven papers relating to Katyn were released to the Public Record Office in 1993. These were:

FO 371/34553 (1943)
FO 371/34590 (1943)
FO 371/39385 (1944)
FO 371/39421 (1944)
FO 371/77476 (1949)
FO 371/77477 (1949)
FO 371/100719 (1952)

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is currently reviewing all other papers withheld on files 371/34563-89, only one of which appears to relate to the Katyn massacre. I shall let my hon. Friend know the outcome of the review in due course.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prescriptions for benzodiazepine drugs have been issued by the Department of Health and Social Services in the past 10 years.

Mr. Ancram: Some 7,995,602 prescriptions for benzodiazepine drugs were issued by general practitioners in Northern Ireland between 1983 and 1993.

Government Offices (Union Flag)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a flag pole has been provided at the premises of the roads service of the Department of the Environment in Armagh city; whether a Union flag has been supplied to these premises; whether advice has been given about the recognised days on which the Union flag is flown at Government offices; why the Union flag was not flown on the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen at these premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: Both a flag pole and a Union flag are provided at the Department of the Environment's roads service premises in Armagh city. Advice is usually given about the recognised days on which the Union flag is flown at Government offices but, owing to an administrative error, the date of the Queen's official birthday was not notified this year. Steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a flag pole has been provided at the premises of the water service at the Department of the Environment in Armagh city; whether a Union flag has been supplied to these premises; whether advice has been given about the recognised days on which the Union flag is to be flown at Government offices; why the Union flag was not flown on the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen at these premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: Neither a flag pole nor a Union flag has been provided at the Department of the Environment's water executive sub-divisional depot at 15 Ardmore road, Armagh. Provision will be made as soon as possible to enable a Union flag to be flown at this building.

Waste Paper Recycling

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to provide for payments to voluntary groups to collect waste paper for recycling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: The Government have no plans to provide for payments to voluntary groups to collect waste paper for recycling. New waste legislation is being prepared, which will introduce to Northern Ireland provisions similar to those contained in part 2 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, including a recycling credit scheme.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sites have been identified in the constituency of South Down for the purposes of industrial development by the Industrial Development Board from 1 April 1984 to 31 March 1994; and which are they.

Mr. Tim Smith: The Industrial Development Board's industrial estates at Killough road in Downpatrick and at Milltown in Warrenpoint have been available for industrial development since 1984.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made by the Industrial Development Board on the indentification of sites for industrial development in South Down.

Mr. Tim Smith: A 6-acre site has been identified at the racecourse on Ballydugan road in Downpatrick. A search for other possible locations has resulted in four sites being identified and a report on their suitability for industrial development is expected at the end of July.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs were created by the Industrial Development Board from 1 April 1984 to 31 March 1994; how many of these were the result of inward investment contracts; and what are the location of these jobs.

Mr. Tim Smith: Information on job creations is not available in the manner requested or by location. However, details of jobs promoted by the Industrial Development Board over the last 10 years are available by district council area and are set out in the table. The Industrial Development Board's own research shows that companies create approximately two thirds of all promoted jobs over a period of three to five years after acceptance of the Industrial Development Board's offer of assistance.

Jobs Promoted by the Industrial Development Board 1984-85 to 1993-94

District Council Area	*Total Jobs Promoted*	*Inward Investment Jobs Included in Total Jobs*
Antrim	3,878	1,972
Ards	1,419	130
Armagh	562	—
Ballymena	1,284	323
Ballymoney	536	116
Banbridge	206	—
Belfast	4,145	2,128
Carrickfergus	978	216
Castlereagh	1,205	407
Coleraine	1,205	20
Cookstown	232	—
Craigavon	5,039	754
Derry	5,356	1,626
Down	589	121
Dungannon	2,544	257
Fermanagh	1,350	109
Larne	1,758	100
Limavady	922	483
Lisburn	2,567	1,160
Magherafelt	832	22
Moyle	52	37
Newry and Mourne	1,475	347
Newtownabbey	4,585	1,222
North Down	572	60
Omagh	392	131
Strabane	1,113	—
TOTAL	44,796	11,741

House Sales, Ards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the income from the sale of houses for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the borough of Ards for the years 1993-94 and 1992-93; and how much of this income was reinvested in the borough of Ards in each of those two years.

Mr. Tim Smith: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but its chief executive has advised me that income from the house sales scheme in the borough of Ards was £1·335 million for 1992-93 and £1·398 million for 1993-94. The Housing Executive's investment in the borough of Ards on new build was £1·919 million in 1992-93 and £1·659 million in 1993-94.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total capital expenditure for minor and major works for each college of further education in Northern Ireland during each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the colleges' total capital expenditure for each financial year from 1989 to 1992 is analysed by area in the "Statements and Summary of the Education and Library Boards' Accounts"—Cmnds. 1531, 1977 and 2249—copies of which are available in the Library.

The 1992-93 and 1993-94 expenditure is as follows:

£000s

Category	*Belfast*	*Western*	*North-Eastern*	*South-Eastern*	*Southern*
1992-93					
Major	—	220	—	1,967	104
Minor	164	195	468	265	105
1993-94[1]					
Major	—	14	—	3,358	—
Minor	222	192	258	74	57

[1] Provisional.

Local Enterprise Development Unit

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been created by the Local Enterprise Development Unit from 1 April 1984 to 31 March 1994; if he will list the locations of these jobs; and how many of these jobs still exist.

Mr. Tim Smith: Up to 1990-91 the principal measure of LEDU performance was job promotions. The job promotion figures for 1984-85 to 1990-91 by regional area are as follows:

Area	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
North	672	799	653	903	675	839	775
South	859	669	992	839	975	1,121	1,110
East	1,903	1,896	1,974	1,896	2,036	2,632	2,942
West	575	524	582	409	709	629	674
TOTAL	4,009	3,888	4,201	4,047	4,395	5,221	5,501

Since 1991-92 LEDU has identified net employment change within all LEDU client companies. These figures are not available on a regional basis.

	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Jobs Created	1,750	2,630	2,870
Jobs Lost due to Closures	2,400	1,610	1,530
Net Employment Change	-650	1,020	1,340

It is not possible to say how many jobs created by LEDU in a given year and location are still in existence.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by county the current estimate of the red squirrel population; what were the figures *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: No estimate of the red squirrel population of Northern Ireland has been made. I counted five when I visited Belvoir forest park on 23 March. Support for the population of red squirrels includes full protection under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

PRIME MINISTER

State Property

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list by date and item for the last 48 months when an item from the state property inventories maintained at No. 10 Downing street was discovered to have been missing; whether each item found to be missing was discovered by the Cabinet Office internal auditors or by one of his officials responsible for making periodic checks of the inventory; and if he will list those items that have now been traced, and where they were discovered.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, no item from the state property inventories has been discovered missing within the stated period.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus EC Food

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the production, distribution and transportation of the surplus EC food currently being distributed; the quantities and costs involved in the current year; and what his projections are for the changes and trends in the system next year and in subsequent years.

Mr. Jack: In 1994, the European Commission allocated 175 mecu—£136 million—to member states under the EC surplus food scheme which is fully financed by the Community. The United Kingdom received 29 mecu—£23 million—for the release from invervention stores of 6,840 tonnes of beef, its transportation to processors, processing into canned stewed steak and its distribution to designated organisations. Certain administrative costs of these organisations are also reimbursed. The transportation of the produce to organisations for distribution to about 1·6 million eligible recipients should be completed by the end of July. Copies of leaflets LP45 and LP46, which describe the scheme rules, are available in the Library of the House.

The European Commission is responsible for allocating funds to member states and for approving their plans for operating this scheme. It does so for one year in advance only. For 1995, the United Kingdom's current plan is to maintain the present arrangements, but I shall be making an announcement about this later in the year.

Animal Exports

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if she will urge the European Commission to adopt a maximum eight-hour limit on slaughter journeys, and prohibit the export of farm animals to non-EU countries which do not comply with EU welfare standards during transport and at slaughter;

(2) if she will support a maximum journey time for animals when the transport directive is decided upon.

Mr. Soames: At this week's Agriculture Council, the United Kingdom withheld support for a revised package of proposals on the welfare of animals during transport. We have obtained a commitment from the Commission that it will bring forward further proposals on journey limits by 1 July 1995.

Bovine Immunodeficiency Virus

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations exist regarding milk produced by cows known to be infected with the bovine immunodeficiency virus.

Mr. Soames: All milk for human consumption must meet the requirements of the Milk and Dairies (General) Regulations 1959 and the Milk (Special Designations) Regulations 1989 made under the Food Safety Act 1990. Animal feed containing milk or milk products must meet the requirements of the Agriculture Act 1970 and the Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1991, as amended. Neither the Acts nor the regulations refer to bovine immunodeficiency-like virus.

Chickens

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what have been the losses in each of the last five years from *(a)* chicken cancer and *(b)* Mareks disease in chickens, and other herpes-based diseases.

Mr. Soames: These diseases are not notifiable and therefore no comprehensive data is maintained.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to her answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) of 18 April, *Official Report*, column *415*, which interested parties he has so far consulted and which he intends to consult regarding the future of the state veterinary service.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend will consult interested parties shortly. The consultation documents will be placed in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Court Escort Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conditions were specified in respect of the number of employees to be employed for the first phase of the contract in the contract with Securicor for carrying out court escort services in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the court escort and custody service contract in the Metropolitan Police area.

There were no conditions relating specifically to the number of employees to be employed by Securicor Custodial Services Limited for the first phase of their contract to carry out court escort services in the Metropolitan Police area. Securicor were required, however, to employ sufficient numbers to staff adequately all courts in the contract area thereby enabling the courts to function effectively. They were also required to employ sufficient staff to escort safely all those who were required at courts.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conditions were specified in respect of pay and terms of service of employees in the contract with Securicor for carrying out court escort services in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the court escort and custody service contract in the Metropolitan Police area.

There were no conditions specific to the pay and terms of service of employees in the contract with Securicor Custodial Services Limited for carrying out court escort services in the Metropolitan Police area.

Securicor are responsible for the recruitment, selection, training, and pay and terms of service for all their personnel. Recruitment policy and procedures must however be approved by the Prison Service. The Prison Service must be satisfied that the level of pay and the terms of service are sufficiently attractive to enable Securicor Custodial Services Limited to recruit and retain high calibre staff.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which companies tendered for the contract to carry out court escort services in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the companies that tendered for the contract to carry out court escort services in the Metropolitan Police area.

Tenders were received on 30 September 1993 from the following four companies: Securicor Custodial Services Limited; Reliance Custodial Services; Group 4 Court Services and Pinkerton Court Escort Services Limited.

After carefully considering the proposals, the Prisons Board decided to award the contract to Securicor Custodial Services Limited.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the value of the contract awarded to Securicor for court escort services in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the value of the contract awarded to Securicor for court escort services in the Metropolitan Police area.

The contract is valued at £96 million and will run for five years.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is currently given to prison officers escorting prisoners to court; what is the duration of that training; and what training, of what duration, will be given to employees of private security firms engaged in this work from 27 June in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the court escort and custody service contract in the Metropolitan Police area.

All newly recruited prison officers receive specific training in court escort duties as part of their nine weeks induction course. The training comprises six sessions of 45 minutes each and

covers relevant court and Prison Service procedures. Many other aspects of the induction course are also relevant to escort duties, including a range of training in interpersonal skills and general security procedures such as searching, handcuffing, and use of the closeting chain.

Securicor are required by the contract to train all their custodial staff to prepare them for certification and employment as Prisoner Custody Officers carrying out prisoner escort duties and as Prisoner Custody Officers performing custodial duties at a contracted out prison.

The training consists of five modules which cover the following subjects: the legal framework; prisoner management; security; supervision and control; general. This training totals 234 hours.

All training must be approved by, and completed to the satisfaction of the Prison Service.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks his Department has made for criminal records of the employees of Securicor who will be carrying out court escort services in the Metropolitan police area as of 27 June.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the checks made for criminal records of the employees of Securicor who will be carrying out court escort services in the Metropolitan Police area.

All people who work at contracted out prisons and for the contracted court escort service are subject to routine enquiries about their suitability to work with prisoners. These enquiries are similar to those made in relation to applicants for Prison Service employment. Candidates who apply for employment, either in the public or the private sector of the Prison Service, in custodial duties or escort functions are exempted from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 by the Rehabilitation Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975, and therefore convictions which ordinarily are regarded as "spent" are taken into account.

Probation and Bail Hostels

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of places in probation and bail hostels covering the Greater London area at 1 April.

Mr. Maclean: As at 1 April, there were a total of 343 approved hostel places in the Greater London area, comprising the inner-London, north-east, south-east and south-west London and Middlesex probation services.

Deportation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many decisions to make a deportation order have been taken in each of the past five years either under section 3(5)(a) or section 3(5)(b) of the Immigration Act 1971 where the person to be deported had made known to the Secretary of State the existence of his or her British citizen children.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Remand

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1990 *(a)* the percentage of prisoners who are on remand for three months and over who are subsequently brought to trial, *(b)* the percentage of those on remand for three months and over who are brought to trial who are found not guilty and *(c)* of those brought to trial, found guilty and sentenced to a prison term, the percentage who have already served as long or longer on remand.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available.

Immigration (EEA Nationals)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific amount of capital or income has been set by the immigration and nationality department to satisfy the Department of a European economic area national's entitlement to residence under Council directive 90/364 EEC.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No specific amounts are set, but in general we expect an applicant to have a sufficient level of income or capital to exceed the limits at which income support could be claimed.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is made under the Immigration (European Economic Area) Order 1994 or elsewhere to give effect to Council directive 75/34 article 5, which says that a retired self-employed citizen of the Union must be permitted a period of two years from the date on which he or she becomes entitled to the right of residence to exercise the right, even if the person has spent those two years outside the country.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Article 6 of the draft Immigration (European Economic Area) Order 1994 provides that a self-employed person who has ceased economic activity in the United Kingdom within the terms of Council directive 75/34/EEC is qualified to reside in the United Kingdom. No time limit is imposed within which this right must be exercised.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence of sickness insurance in respect of all risks the immigration and nationality department has determined to be appropriate for the purposes of Council directive 90/364 EEC.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This requirement is not applied at present.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many citizens of the European Union have been issued letters in each of the past five years advising them that their presence in the United Kingdom is no longer lawful on the ground that the person is not or is no longer exercising a treaty right; and how many of those decisions were subsequently executed in each of the past five years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information is available for only part of the period requested. Between September 1992 and December 1992, 27 letters were issued to European Community nationals advising them that, because they

were not in employment and had insufficient resources to avoid becoming a burden on public funds, they were not exercising a right of residence under European Community law and accordingly should make arrangements to leave the United Kingdom. In 1993, 180 such letters were issued. Since 1 January 1994, when EC rights of residence were extended to the European economic area, 563 such letters have been issued to EEA nationals. The Benefits Agency is informed so that it can cease payment of any income support, but it is not known how many of those concerned subsequently left the country.

Road Schemes (Protests)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total costs of policing for protests regarding *(a)* the M11 link road, *(b)* Twyford Down and *(c)* the Swainswick and Batheaston bypass; and what additional funds have been made to the forces concerned.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Debts (Non-Payment)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men and how many women have been imprisoned for non-payment of television licence fees in each of the last five years, giving the average amount of debt unpaid by these offenders.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is for 1991-93 and is given in the table. No information is available for the period before 1991 because the offence of non-payment of fines for using a television without a licence was not separately identified in the prison statistics. No information is available centrally regarding the amount of debt outstanding.

Receptions into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of fine imposed for using a television without a licence 1991-1993.

Year	Number received	
	Males	Females
1991	258	136
1992	405	163
[1]1993	553	292

[1] Provisional figures

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fine defaulters have been imprisoned for non-payment of *(a)* television licences and *(b)* community charge or council tax since 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table. No information is available for the period before 1991 for non-payment of fines for using a television without a licence because the offence was not separately identified in the prison statistics.

Receptions into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of fine imposed for using a television without a licence and non-payment of the community charge, 1991-1993.

Offence	Year			
	1990	1991	1992	1993[1]
Non-payment of fine for using a TV without a licence	n/a	394	568	845
Non-payment of community charge[2]	1	113	504	1,157

[1] Provisional information.
[2] A non-criminal offence.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female debt defaulters were imprisoned in each month for the latest 12 months for which information is available in respect of non-payment of (i) community charge or poll tax, (ii) rates or council tax, (iii) television licence, (iv) hire purchase and (v) other debts.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is given in the table. No information is available centrally for non-payment of hire purchase.

Receptions into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of the community charge, rates, other debts and for using a television without a licence: May 1993 to April 1994[1]

Month	Non-criminal offences			Using a television without a licence[2]
	Non-payment of community charge	Non-payment of rates	Other debts[2]	
Males				
1993				
May	97	16	23	43
June	59	12	22	45
July	106	12	32	47
August	82	10	25	45
September	96	14	29	49
October	125	8	23	48
November	96	14	20	44
December	62	6	13	34
1994				
January	78	12	23	52
February	90	10	20	40
March	97	5	15	34
April	72	7	19	31
Females				
1993				
May	8	2	—	19
June	5	2	—	20

Month	Non-criminal offences			Using a television without a licence[2]
	Non-payment of community charge	Non-payment of rates	Other debts[2]	
July	10	1	—	31
August	15	—	—	31
September	19	5	—	20
October	12	—	—	27
November	10	—	—	31
December	6	—	—	21
1994				
January	9	—	—	25
February	15	—	—	28
March	20	1	—	19
April	12	1	—	22

[1] Provisional information.
[2] In default of payment of a fine.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 20 courts passing the largest number of custodial sentences in respect of the non-payment of debts for the latest period of 12 months for which there is information, specifying in addition how many of these sentences were for non-payment of *(a)* television licences and *(b)* community charge.

Mr. Maclean: I regret that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Urban Areas (Policing)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the formula for calculating areas of urban population for policing purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A new needs-based formula is currently being developed to inform the allocation of resources between police authorities. The definition of urban areas is being considered in that context.

Deportations

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been made in the last year for which figures are available of excessive force during deportations; and how many of these complaints were *(a)* about immigration officers and *(b)* about employees of private security firms.

Mr. Charles Wardle: During the 12 months to 31 May 1994, complaints of this nature were made in four cases. All related to employees of private security firms, and all were found to be unsubstantiated.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to date of implementing the Dangerous Dogs Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on the cost to the police, local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts of implementing the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 is not held centrally.

Life Sentences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners at present serving a life sentence in prisons in England and Wales had their sentence reviewed by the Life Sentence Review Board during 1993.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In 1993, the Parole Board considered 680 life sentence cases for release. I regret that information on the split between male and female cases is not readily available.

Blakenhurst Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the amount of money paid to United Kingdom Detention Services for *(a)* start-up costs and *(b)* phase-in costs under the contract to run Blakenhurst prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the amount of money paid to United Kingdom Detention Services.

The payments for start up costs were £3·3 million excluding VAT, and the payments for phase in costs were £4·5 million excluding VAT.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the amount of money paid to United Kingdom Detention Services for operating costs under the contract to run Blakenhurst prison during its first year of operation; and if this sum included the amounts paid for start-up and phase-in costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 22 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the amount of money paid to United Kingdom

Detention Services for operating costs under the contract to run Blakenhurst Prison during its first year of operation; and if this sum included the amounts paid for start up and phase in costs.

The amount of money paid in the first year of operation was £9·4 million excluding VAT.

This sum does not include the start up costs which were paid before the prison commenced operation. However, it does include the phase in costs which related to the period during which the population of the prison grew to 95 per cent. of the certified normal accommodation. This point was reached in November 1993.

European Elections

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the turnout across the United Kingdom in the recent European elections; and what was the comparable figure in each of the other member states.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about the number of electors and the number of valid votes counted in the United Kingdom will be included in a Home Office statistical bulletin. Information about the number of people voting in other member states is not held centrally and I will write to the hon. Member once I have the available information.

Travel Documents

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* British visitor passports and *(b)* British excursion documents were issued last year; and what was the cost in each case;

(2) what plans he has to abolish the British visitor passport and British excursion document;

(3) what plans he has to consult relevant organisations about the future of the British visitors passport and the British excursion document; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1988, the Home Affairs Select Committee recommended that urgent consideration should be given to the withdrawal of the British visitor's passport as soon as the computerisation of the passport issuing process was fully operational. This position has now been reached and in September 1993 the United Kingdom Passport Agency began a review of the suitability of the British visitor's passport and the British excursion document as alternatives to the standard passport for travel abroad. The review is considering document security, international acceptability, customer choice and convenience, and other relevant factors. About 1,972,800 British visitor's passports, and 249,000 British excursion documents were issued in 1993-94 at a cost of £12 and £3 respectively.

The Passport Agency has consulted widely on the review, and detailed responses have been received from travel agents, tour operators, transport and shipping associations, consumer groups and interested organisations within Government. The Passport Agency will be reporting its findings to me in the next few months, when a decision will be taken.

Animal Testing

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the guidance on eye irritation tests.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The guidelines issued in 1987 have been reviewed by the animals (scientific procedures) inspectorate and my right hon. and learned Friend has agreed that revised guidelines should be issued to establishments where such testing is carried out. The guidelines have been endorsed by the Animal Procedures Committee. Copies of the guidelines have been placed in the Library.

The revised guidelines aim to promote best practice in order to keep to the minimum any suffering involved to animals used for eye irritation tests while enabling the requirements of regulatory authorities for such testing to be satisfied.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Switzerland

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Switzerland's relations with the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Switzerland has long-standing close links with the European Union. Following the Swiss referendum rejecting European Economic Area membership, the European Union agreed in principle in November 1993 to start negotiations with Switzerland on a number of new bilateral agreements. The Swiss referendum vote in February in favour of a ban from 2004 on lorries transiting the Alps has so far prevented agreement on a mandate for road transport negotiations. But the May Foreign Affairs Council asked the Commission to bring forward mandates in other priority areas and to obtain clarification of the transit ban, so that transport mandates could be adopted. The United Kingdom has pressed for negotiations to open quickly.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *446*, what precise steps are being taken to encourage India and Pakistan's accession to the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to urge India and Pakistan to accede to the non-proliferation treaty at every appropriate opportunity both in our bilateral contacts and in multilateral forums. We are also supportive of all efforts to improve confidence and security in the region which we believe will help to create an environment in which accession to the NPT by these two countries will become more likely.

North Korea

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent developments concerning the verification of North Korea's nuclear facilities; and what action he is proposing to take.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: North Korea's continued non-compliance with its safeguards agreement is a cause of great concern. North Korea recently completed the removal of all the used fuel rods from its 5 MW nuclear reactor without allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency to verify independently where different rods had been located in the reactor, which prevented the agency

from verifying whether plutonium had previously been diverted from the reactor. A further worrying development is North Korea's decision to withdraw from the IAEA, though this does not affect the legality of their safeguards obligations. Action, including possible sanctions, is now being considered by the United Nations Security Council.

Yemen

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of which countries appear to be supportive of each of the two sides in the Yemeni conflict.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Those countries that have issued statements about the crisis in Yemen have, as far as we are aware, supported neither one side nor the other. United Nations Security Council resolution 924, calling for an immediate ceasefire and dialogue to end the crisis, has received widespread support.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical action is being proposed to enforce the United Nations embargo on arms supplies to both sides in the Yemeni war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: United Nations Security Council resolution 924 urged countries to cease the supply of arms and other materials to Yemen. No action is necessary in respect of direct exports from the United Kingdom since all military exports are already licensable. No licences have been issued for military equipment for the Yemen since this resolution was passed.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether Iraq is militarily supporting north Yemen in the Yemeni war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no reliable information about Iraq's involvement in Yemen.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of which British commercial interests both in and outside Yemen are put at risk by the Yemeni conflict.

Mr. Needham: I have been asked to reply.

Plans by several British companies to assist the Republic of Yemen in refurbishing its infrastructure and developing its natural resources have been set back by the current conflict. For example, it was hoped that a major British company would be awarded a contract to help redevelop the oil refinery outside Aden, which has been hit by air raids. Additionally, a British consortium planning the expansion of Mukalla port and power generation has had to postpone its plans.

Cyprus

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he fully supports the United Nations Secretary-General's report on Cyprus; and whether he endorses the Secretary-General's criticism of the lack of political will by the Turkish side to promote a solution to the Cyprus issue.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Nations Secretary-General's report of 30 May was an accurate reflection of the situation at the time. There appears to have been some progress since then. We await a further report by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Occupied Territories

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions he has made to the initial installation of a Palestinian administration in the former occupied territories.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have contributed £1·3 million to the World bank's trust fund for technical assistance and are contributing through the EC to the start-up costs of the new Palestinian Administration, and of the police in particular. Bilaterally, we have assisted the Administration with expert legal advice on the drafting of the Basic Law and with police training and equipment. We are providing assistance in the financial sector, including Bank of England assistance with the establishment of a central monetary authority, to the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction, and with the legal infrastructure in Gaza. We will also provide help in organising and monitoring the elections.

Iran

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the reasons given by the Iranian Government for the expulsion of a British diplomat from the British embassy in Teheran; and what was his response to this action.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iranian Government are reported as having claimed that Mr. Cowell, the British diplomat expelled from Iran, was involved in actions and behaviour contrary to diplomatic norms and had connections with terrorist groups in Iran. We have made it clear to the Iranians that these allegations are completely unjustified. In our view, Mr. Cowell's withdrawal was a tit-for-tat reaction to the removal of an Iranian first secretary in London in connection with attempts by members of the Iranian embassy to distribute forged documents.

European Union

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the last 10 years the United Kingdom has used its veto in meetings of the Council of Ministers and other EU ministerial groupings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom can always ensure that its concerns are taken fully into account where the treaty requires unanimous voting. As votes are not normally taken in these circumstances, it is not possible to quantify the number of occasions over the past decade on which we have used the requirement for unanimity in order to insist on a particular outcome.

Israel

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent developments there have been in Israel-Jordan relationships; and what is his policy on them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Israel and Jordan have agreed to set up a bilateral commission to discuss water, environment, boundaries and security that will meet in the region in July. We welcome this, and hope there will be further progress on all tracks towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement.

Malaysia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been in changing the Malaysian Government's policy of not awarding Government contracts to British firms.

Mr. Goodlad: We have been working hard to restore full trade relations with Malaysia and have remained in close touch with the Malaysian Government. The Malaysians have recently said that the embargo is under review, but have not told us when it will be lifted.

Caspian Sea

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to him by the Russian Government concerning a British-Azerbaijani memorandum signed in February on oil and gas projects in the Caspian sea.

Mr. Hogg: The Governments of the United Kingdom and Azerbaijan signed a memorandum of understanding on energy co-operation in February 1994 which made reference to the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian sea. The Government of the Russian Federation subsequently transmitted to Her Majesty's embassy in Moscow a note setting out their views on the legal status of the Caspian sea.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Governments have now committed forces to the United Nations peacekeeping force in Rwanda; and when it is expected that these forces will be in place.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo and Mali have all responded positively to the United Nations Secretary-General's appeal for troops to agument the United Nations aid mission in Rwanda. It is expected that the first of these troops will be able to be deployed in early July.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what logistical support the United Kingdom Government have committed to the peacekeeping force in Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has offered the United Nations 50 4-tonne four-wheel-drive vehicles for use by the United Nations peacekeeping force in Rwanda.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 13 and 14 June.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 and 14 June in Luxembourg.

The presidency briefed the Council on its plans for the European Council in Corfu on 24 and 25 June. Growth, competitiveness and unemployment would be the lead items. Other subjects would include the next President of the Commission, Mediterranean issues, aspects of the common foreign and security policy and a formal decision to set up the 1996 study group as agreed in March at the informal Foreign Ministers' meeting in Ioannina.

President Delors presented a progress report on follow-up action on the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment. There was a general discussion on issues that would be raised under this item at Corfu.

The Council discussed relations with Ukraine, in particular proposals for assistance in the fields of nuclear safety and agriculture.

The EC and its member states and Ukraine also signed a partnership and co-operation agreement, with President Kravchuk signing for Ukraine. In addition, the Council approved a negotiating mandate for an EC/Ukraine interim agreement on trade matters.

The Council agreed that the EC-Russia partnership and co-operation agreement could be signed in Corfu, subject to Russian confirmation of the lifting of certain restrictions on the operations of European Union banks in Russia.

The Council welcomed the ad referendum agreement by both the Muslim and Croat Mostar delegations to the memorandum of understanding defining the role of the European Union administrator who would shortly take over the administration of the city. The Council also discussed how best to develop its relationship with Croatia, and to encourage continued Croatian co-operation with the peace process.

The European Union observer for Cyprus reported to the Council on recent developments in the United Nation's efforts towards implementation of the Secretary-General's package of confidence-building measures. The Council noted that, in spite of the unhelpful Turkish Cypriot attitude until recently, a last effort was being made to secure agreement, and that the United Nations Secretary-General would be reporting to the Security Council again soon. The Council agreed to continue to monitor the situation and to discuss it again at Corfu.

The Council agreed mandates for the negotiation of new financial protocols with Cyprus and Malta.

The Commission presented a paper on the EU-Mercosur relationship. After discussion, it agreed to produce a further paper on options for developing this relationship. The issue will be discussed further under the German presidency.

Ministers agreed to extend the common foreign and security policy joint action on the stability pact to cover the follow-up to the Paris launch conference. The documents agreed at the Paris conference will be transmitted to Corfu.

The Council noted a paper outlining the options available for financing costs arising from common foreign and security policy actions. It was agreed that these should be discussed with the incoming European Parliament and that further work should be undertaken on specific procedures.

The Council discussed a presidency compromise package designed to secure agreement to a regulation to create a common Community regime of export controls on dual use goods. The package was agreed by 10 member

states including the United Kingdom but Denmark and Belgium asked for a little more time to reach a final decision.

The Council discussed a proposal to amend the existing regulation on outward processing trade—OPT—in textiles. The subject was referred for further work by experts, pending discussion at the July FAC. A number of delegations, including the United Kingdom, called for the Commission to make a separate proposal establishing duty exemption for OPT conducted with the countries of central and eastern Europe.

The Council appoved the imposition of a definitive anti-dumping duty on large aluminium electrolytic capacitors from South Korea and Taiwan. The United Kingdom made a statement opposing this proposal, expressing doubts about the injury case and concern for the effects of such high duties on users.

The Council agreed on a mandate for the Community to participate in negotiations on a convention to combat desertification, recommended by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

A co-operation council with Israel was held in the margins, attended by Mr. Shimon Peres, the Israeli Foreign Minister.

Because of shortage of time, the presidency deleted from the agenda the items dealing with aid to banana growers in the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, shipbuilding, access to documents and other business, including imports from China. These will be taken at a future Council.

No votes were taken during the Council.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Science and Technology

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the importance of science and technology in the Government's White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win."

Mr. Waldegrave: The competitiveness White Paper reaffirms the message of the last year's White Paper, "Realising our Potential", Cm 2250—that science, engineering and technology make an essential contribution to national competitiveness.

Research Councils

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish his recent letter to chairmen of research councils setting out the inter-relationships between the chief executives and the director general of research councils.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have already done so. On 23 May I sent copies of the letter to the hon. Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) and to the Chairman of the Science and Technology Select Committee. A copy of the letter has also been placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of applications to his Department for projections of future state pension entitlement in the last year for which figures are available and the cost to public funds of this service.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the pension forecast service is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 21 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking about the Retirement Pension forecast service.

The Benefits Agency provides centralised services at DSS Longbenton, giving Retirement Pension (RP) forecasts and advice. One is for customers who are currently abroad or going to live abroad and is run by the Agency's Overseas Benefits Directorate. During the year ended March 1994, applications for forecasts totalling 26,142 were made to this service.

The main RP forecasting service, which is part of the Agency's Newcastle Pensions Directorate, serves customers living in the UK. In the year ended March 1994 this service received 476,339 applications for pension forecasts.

The combined running costs for these services are in the region of £1·5 million.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants are registered at the Chesterfield, Buxton, Ilkeston, Derby—Beckett street—Derby—London road—and Sutton Benefits Agency offices as at March 1994; and how many at each of these were *(a)* income support claimants signing on as unemployed, *(b)* pensioners, *(c)* income support claimants receiving a lone-parent premium, *(d)* those receiving a disability premium, *(e)* those receiving a carer's premium and *(f)* those receiving a severe disability premium.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 21 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for statistics relating to Income Support claims administered by offices within your constituency area.

The complete range of information is not available in the format requested and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. This is because statistics relating to customers receiving a Carer Premium and or a Severe Disability Premium are only collated on a national basis. The latest information available for those recieving a Carer Premium is available in the Annual Statistical Enquiry (ASE) for May 1992. The latest information for those receiving a Severe Disability Premium is held in the Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (QSE) for August 1993. A copy of both are available in the Library.

Both of the above premiums can be awarded at the same time as other premiums.

I have attached a table showing pensioner customers, lone parent customers, unemployed customers and the number where the statistical information held on the Income Support Computer System (ISCS) shows that a Disability Premium has been awarded.

Guidance advises that wherever a Disability Premium has been awarded, the statistical symbol should be amended on the ISCS. However, there may be cases where the customer receives a Disability Premium in respect of a partner where this action has not been taken, therefore the figures quoted may be inaccurate.

It should also be noted that the number of customers who receive a Lone Parent Premium may not equate to the number of Lone Parents. This is because the Lone Parent may be entitled to a more beneficial premium.

I have taken Sutton Office to mean Sutton-in-Ashfield.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Office	*Type of Income Support*
Derby (London Road)	
E	6,326
P	4,178
L	3,440
D	1,214
Derby (Beckett Street)	
E	7,295
P	5,733
L	2,502
D	1,446
Buxton	
E	3,086
P	2,549
L	1,203
D	594
Ilkeston	
E	5,106
P	4,501
L	2,386
D	1,239
Chesterfield	
E	8,853
P	7,037
L	9,948
D	2,358
Sutton-in-Ashfield	
E	4,297
P	3,169
L	1,875
D	1,138

E=Unemployed.
P=Pensioners.
L=Lone Parents.
D=Those in receipt of a Disability Premium.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the cost and benefit to the taxpayer of a recent party for employees of the Child Support Agency in Plymouth.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. David Jamieson, dated 21 June 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the cost and benefit to the tax payer of a recent lunch that was organised for employees of the Child Support Agency Centre in Plymouth.

The lunch was organised as a local initiative by the Manager of the Child Support Agency Centre in Plymouth, at a cost of £4,800. It replaced the planned opening ceremony for the Centre which was deferred. I am looking further into the circumstances surrounding this occasion.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been made in Nottinghamshire for industrial injuries disablement benefit for emphysema and chronic bronchitis; how many have been successful; and how many and, on what grounds, have been refused.

Mr. Scott: The administration of industrial injuries disablement benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 21 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about claims to Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) for chronic bronchitis and emphysema Prescribed Disease (D12) in Nottinghamshire.

Firstly, I would like to explain that there are two stages to the take on of claims for prescribed disease D12 (known as chronic bronchitis and emphysema), for which industrial injuries disablement benefit has been available since 13 September 1993 for people who have worked for at least 20 years underground in a coal mine.

Stage 1 was restricted to claims from people who were aged 70 or over on 13 September 1993 or had an award of higher rate Disability Living Allowance care component or higher rate Attendance Allowance. Stage 1 ended on 28 February 1994; stage 2 commenced from 1 March and is open to anybody to claim. All claims are considered for payment from 13 September 1993.

The information is not available in the precise format requested. This is because statistics are maintained by Benefits Agency (BA) Branch Offices and Districts whose boundaries do not correspond exactly with those of counties. I have therefore tabled, in the attached appendix, statistics which relate to the BA Districts of East and West Nottinghamshire and the Mansfield Branch Office which deal mainly with the Nottinghamshire area. It should be noted that these figures will include some people living outside the Nottinghamshire area.

The figures have been obtained from a 100 per cent. count as of 12 June 1994 and may be subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix
Claims to industrial injuries disablement benefit for prescribed disease D12 (Chronic bronchitis and emphysema) in the Nottinghamshire area)

	Number
Claims being proceeded with	4,452
Successful claims	362
Disallowed on prescription	92
Regulation 22 cases[1]	13
Assessed at 1 to 13 per cent.[2]	1
Not diagnosed	3,261

[1] Where an applicant is already receiving IIDB in respect of PD D1 (pneumoconiosis) and has been assessed at over 50 per cent. disablement with chronic bronchitis and emphysema as a contributory factor.

[2] IIDB not payable for assessments under 14 per cent.

Notes:

1. The above figures do not include 66 cases where the claim was

returned to the customer to claim at the correct time but they have not reclaimed yet.
2. Source 100 per cent. count and subject to amendment.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of average earnings is represented by severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Scott: As at 4 April 1992, the latest year for which information is available, the average payment of severe disablement allowance was £37·45. This figure, which is based on the rates of benefit payable from 11 April 1991, represents 13·2 per cent. of national average earnings at April 1991.[1]

[1]One per cent. sample of claimants for Great Britain and New Earnings Survey (Great Britain) April 1991.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the cases and amounts of money recovered by the compensation recovery unit from victims of asbestosis in Scotland since 1989.

Mr. Hague: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions (Christmas Bonus)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what date the Christmas bonus for pensioners was introduced; what was the amount of bonus payable to *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples in its first year; when it was last increased; what would be the amount of Christmas bonus payable to pensioners in 1994 if the level of payment had reflected the movement in the retail prices index or the average wage, whichever was the higher; and if he will make a statement.

(2) if he will increase the Christmas bonus for pensioners in the current year to reflect the movement in retail prices since 1972.

Mr. Hague: The Christmas bonus was first introduced in 1972 at the rate of £10 for single pensioners and £20 for pensioner couples. No Government have increased the bonus since. If the Christmas bonus had been increased in line with the movement in the retail prices index or the average wage, whichever was the higher, the rate at December 1994 would be £101·90. We have no plans to increase the bonus.

Sources:
1. The Retail Prices Index (All Items), as published by the Central Statistical Office.
2. Average Earnings Index (Whole Economy, Unadjusted) as published by the Employment Department.

Note:
Calculations rounded to nearest 5 pence.

Michael Boothe

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what review of procedures he has instituted following the conviction of Michael Boothe for benefit fraud.

Mr. Hague: Following the conviction of Michael Boothe, a review of recruitment procedures is being undertaken to improve the checks made upon applicants. We are examining the usefulness of personal referees and the procedures for taking references from previous employers.

In addition, a study is due to start in July to determine why girocheques, and other instruments of payment, are being issued clerically.

A full investigation of any specific allegations of further internal fraud will be conducted.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many refusals of disability living allowance at review have gone to appeal; and in how many cases the refusal at the review stage has been overturned on appeal;

(2) how many refusals of disability living allowance have been taken to review; and in how many cases the original refusal has been overturned at review;

(3) to what extent the proportion of successful appeals against refusal of disability living allowance exceeds the proportion of successful appeals against refusal of attendance allowance in the last three years for which it existed.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested as the reason for review or appeal is not recorded. Neither is it possible to give comparative figures for disability living allowance and attendance allowance appeals. Prior to 1992, decisions to award or refuse AA were made by a designated medical practitioner on behalf of the AA board, and there was no right of appeal analogous to the present right of appeal to a disability appeal tribunal. The AA board, itself, carried out reviews where requested. An appeal could be made to the social security commissioner, but only on a point of law.

Reviews and appeals are not requested solely because of a refusal to award benefit. People already receiving DLA may be dissatisfied with the level or duration of benefit and many reviews are promoted by deterioration in a person's condition.

The available figures relating to reviews and appeals are shown in the tables.

	Number
All new claims for disability living allowance[1]	1,030,942
Rejected claims for disability living allowance[1]	453,533
All reviews requested within 3 months of the decision on the claim[1]	231,985
Unsuccesful reviews requested within 3 months of the decision on the claim[1]	124,821
Appeals made[2]	38,785
Appeals heard and decided[2]	24,409
Successful appeals[2]	12,996

[1] 6 February 1992 to 31 May 1994. Source is DSS (Analytical Services Division) 100 per cent. count of cases.
[2] February 1992 to 17 June 1994. Source is Independent Tribunal Service 100 per cent. count of cases.

Per cent.

	Proportion of reviews successful	*Proportion of appeals to Disability appeal tribunals successful*
Attendance allowance 1990	[3]75	—
Attendance allowance 1991	[3]72	—
Attendance allowance 1992	[3]79	—
Disability living allowance	[1]46	[2]53

[1] 6 February 1992 to 31 May 1994. Source is DSS (Analytical Services Division) 100 per cent. count of cases.
[2] February 1992 to 17 June 1994. Source is Independent Tribunal Service 100 per cent. count of cases.
[3] 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994. Source is DSS (Analytical Services Division) 100 per cent. count of cases.

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against the passage of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill since its Report stage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Since commencement of Report stage, we have received a number of representations expressing a range of views including opposition to and support for the passage of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. A detailed breakdown is not available.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to the Exchequer of invalid care allowance; and how many people are in receipt of it currently.

Mr. Scott: As at 13 June 1994, the latest date for which information is available, there were 247,836[1] people in receipt of invalid care allowance.

The latest expenditure estimate for 1993-94 is £433 million[2].

[1] Based on a 100 per cent count and subject to amendment.
[2] Departmental Report 1994.

EDUCATION

Schools (Organisation)

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he plans to issue fresh guidance on the organisation of schools, reflecting the new provisions of the Education Act 1993.

Mr. Patten: I have, earlier today, issued a consultative circular on the supply of school places, to which interested parties have been asked to respond by Friday 5 August. The circular emphasises the importance of quality, choice, diversity and cost-effectiveness in the provision of new school places and describes the action being taken to secure that. Principal elements in the circular are:

(i) the announcement that, in certain circumstances, I may be prepared to approve proposals for new school places despite the absence of a projected shortfall of places in the area, in particular where in my view the proposed new school places would significantly enhance the quality, choice and diversity of education available in that area and where there would be scope, following the approval of new places, for rationalising places at other schools;

(ii) a description of the new framework for the organisation of schools under the 1993 Act, including the role of the new Funding Agency for Schools;

(iii) guidance on how promoters might establish new grant-maintained schools. This new pathway is already attracting considerable interest;

(iv) an outline of the streamlined process for the removal of surplus places, where practicable, while acknowledging that some may need to be retained to promote parental choice, or to preserve access to schools in rural areas.

WALES

European Constituencies (GDP)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give in cash terms, and as a percentage of the United Kingdom average the gross domestic product per capita for *(a)* each of the new European constituencies in Wales, *(b)* the average for Wales, *(c)* the United Kingdom and *(d)* the European Community.

Mr. Redwood: The following table gives the information requested, except for information on European constituencies in Wales, which is not available.

	GDP per head[1] 1991	*Percentage of United Kingdom average*
Wales	12,452	84·5
United Kingdom	14,732	100·0
EUR 12	14,989	101·7

[1] Expressed in terms of purchasing power standard units (purchasing power adjusted ECU).
Source: Eurostat

United Kingdom GDP grew faster than GDP in Germany or France in the 1980s—the best relative performance since 1945. The latest forecast from the International Monetary Fund—April—suggests that the United Kingdom will have the fastest growth among major EC countries in both 1994 and 1995. In 1991, direct taxes, including community charge and social security contributions, on households in the United Kingdom took a lower proportion of personal income than in any other major European country.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers in Wales were entitled to receive sheep premium grants; how many claims, and what percentage of the total number of entitled farmers, were settled by *(a)* 30 April, *(b)* 15 May and *(c)* 31 May.

Mr. Redwood: Some 17,410 eligible claims were received in 1993. The number and percentage of claims settled is as follows:

	By 30 April	*By 15 May*	*By 31 May*
Advance Payment	15,877	16,064	16,113
Percentage	91·2	92·3	92·6
Final Payment	Nil	Nil	11,443
Percentage	—	—	65·6

As at 8 June 14,422—82·8 per cent.—of final payments had been sent to farmers.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of the annual reports of the NHS trusts in Wales which became operational on 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Copies of the annual reports for 1992-93 and 1993-94 will be placed in the Library of the House when available.

Rural Wales Forum

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet representatives of the Rural Wales Forum to discuss their survey of the difficulties faced by village halls; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Financial support to village halls in Wales is available under a number of schemes, including the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres programme. On 29 March, I announced under this programme a three-year grant package of nearly £700,000 to support 44 local youth and community facilities in Wales costing a total of almost £1·62 million.

Other Welsh Office schemes which can be considered for such support include the strategic development scheme and the social grants scheme operated by the Development Board for Rural Wales.

Local Authorities

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which local authorities have failed to provide a list of background papers on official reports to their council committees in each of the last five years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the annual budget of the Development Board for Rural Wales; how the members of the Development Board for Rural Wales are appointed; and how many jobs have been brought to rural Wales as a result of the work of the development board.

Mr. Redwood: The development board's grant-in-aid provision for 1992-95 is £14·4 million. This, together with receipts from the sale of land and buildings, rents and other income, will enable the board to plan for gross expenditure of £27·3 million on such activities as property and business development, housing, a social programme and its own overheads.

All candidates for appointment to the development board are considered by Ministers on their individual merits. Account is taken of the overall needs of the board and the balance of skills among members. The legislation provides that the board shall consist of between 11 and 13 members, at least five of whom shall be appointed after consultation with local authorities.

Censuses of employment show that in 1991, the number of employees in rural Wales had increased by 11,000 since 1981. This represents employment growth of 18·9 per cent. in rural Wales. Comparative figures for Wales as a whole and for Great Britain are 2·9 per cent. and 1·2 per cent. respectively. Over the same period, employment in the manufacturing sector had increased by 15·6 per cent. in rural Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to make an announcement on the future of the Development Board for Rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: On 14 March 1994, I announced my intention of undertaking a review of the future of the DBRW. All Welsh MPs and local authorities have been consulted, together with a number of other interested bodies. Over 80 responses have been received and these are currently being considered. I hope to make my announcement before the summer recess, following consultations with colleagues.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour of the retention of the Development Board for Rural Wales and *(b)* against the retention of the Development Board for Rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* On 14 March 1994, I announced my intention of undertaking a review of the future of the DBRW. All Welsh MPs and local authorities were consulted, together with a number of other interested bodies. Some 81 replies have so far been received. A wide variety of opinions has been expressed, with about half the respondents favouring retention of the DBRW.

Building Regulations

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce new building regulations and amend existing building regulations to promote the development of barrier-free housing in terms of *(a)* new build and *(b)* renovated or modernised properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend, in conjunction with the Secretary of State for the Environment, intends to consult on a range of building regulation provisions which could be applied to the design of new dwellings for the benefit of disabled people.

There are no plans to consider the application of such requirements to existing dwellings subject to renovation or modernisation.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how the Welsh Office determined the baseline for the health gain target for Wales relating to the communication skills of people with learning difficulties and disabilities, as set out in the protocol in health gain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: An exercise to provide a range of information relating to individuals with a mental handicap is planned for later this year.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by county the current estimate of the red squirrel population; and what were the figures *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 21 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *103*.

South Gwynedd Enterprise Zone

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made with a view to securing enterprise zone status for the Trawsfynydd-Blaenau-Pfestiniog travel-to-work area in Meirionnydd Nant Conwy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The South Gwynedd partnership is working up a case for an enterprise zone in that area.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many representations he has received on the proposed re-introduction of compulsory sheep dipping; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many representations he has received during the last 12 months on the subject of sheep scab; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received numerous representations. Sheep scab is a disease which can be controlled by individual farmers, who are aware of the preventive measures and procedures needed to deal with it. The Government have no plans to reintroduce controls. The Government propose to carry out a publicity campaign during the autumn to encourage farmers to treat their sheep. We shall be stepping up our efforts to ensure that unfit animals are not presented for sale by increasing the official veterinary presence at markets.

Minority Languages Treaty

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when it is expected that Her Majesty's Government will be a signatory to the European Union's treaty on minority languages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Government need fully to consider all the implications of signing the Council of Europe's European charter on regional and minority languages, and no decision has yet been reached. So far, fewer than half of the Council's member states have become signatories.

Agricultural Tenancy Reform

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received in favour of agricultural tenancy reform; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received four representations in favour of agricultural tenancy reform.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the representations he has received on the subject of the proposed reform regarding agricultural tenancies were in favour of a statutory minimum period and how many were in favour of total contractual freedom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received three representations on the subject of agricultural tenancy reform which were in favour of minimum period tenancies and four representations which were in favour of total contractual freedom.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidelines will be issued to the Staff Commission for Wales to ensure equity and parity between existing employees of county councils and district or borough councils; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what criteria will be employed by the Staff Commission for Wales in determining which members of staff should not transfer from existing to new local authorities under the Local Government (Wales) Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what guidelines will be issued to protect the employment prospects of those middle management who may be the subject of prior consideration under the staffing provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend will issue guidance to the Staff Commission after Royal Assent to the Local Government (Wales) Bill *(Lords)*. This will deal, among other things, with staff transfer arrangements, prior consideration, and equality of treatment of county and district staff. The draft guidance issued on 21 April and circulated to all members of Standing Committee A has prompted many representations which are being considered.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State undertook on 16 June to write to the hon. Member on a number of staffing matters. He will do so shortly, and will place a copy of his letter in the Library of the House.

Infertility

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what provision is made for infertility investigation in the Clwyd health authority area by the Welsh Office;

(2) what is the provision for infertility treatment in Clwyd health authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision for infertility investigation and treatment is a matter for Clwyd health authority, which will take into account need, competing demands and available resources.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Clwyd health authority has sought advice from the Welsh Office as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No.

Laser Treatment

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the centres providing laser treatment under the national health service for short sight and astigmatism.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The use of lasers to treat short sight and other sight problems is being evaluated. Currently, there are no NHS centres in Wales providing this treatment.

Market Testing

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what revisions he intends to make to his programme of market testing.

Mr. Redwood: The revised programme, which runs from October 1993 until September 1996, covers activities involving at least 1,500 posts and valued in excess of £20 million, compared with the previous programme total of 300 posts and £5 million. The programme includes the following:

Welsh Office: Typing Services
Records Management Services
Architects and Surveyors Services
Activities within Cadw
National Museum of Wales: Warding function
Sports Council for Wales: Activities at Plas Menai and the Welsh Institute for Sport
Non medical activities within the Welsh Health Common Services Authority
The Careers Service in Wales

Cancer

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many cases of cancers of all types per 100,000 head of population there have been in Wales in each year since 1970;

(2) how many cases of bone cancer per 100,000 head of population there have been in Wales in each year since 1970.

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 25 May 1994]:* Complete data on cancer registrations in Wales are not available prior to 1974. The information available is given in the following table.

Cancer Registrations: Rate per 100,000 population[1]

	Bone Cancer[2] *(ICD(9)170)*	*All Cancers (ICD(9)140-208)*
1974	1·8	399·8
1975	1·5	417·7
1976	1·3	408·1
1977	1·5	417·9
1978	2·3	435·8
1979	2·5	443·3
1980	2·1	445·8
1981	1·7	449·3
1982[3]	1·9	452·1
1983	2·1	489·2
1984	2·8	513·5
1985	2·5	528·1
1986	2·8	541·8
1987	2·6	537·4
1988	2·2	552·2
1989[4]	1·8	536·6

[1] Registration of primary growth site.
[2] May include a number of cases where the cancer was recorded as a primary growth but was secondary.
[3] Data for this year may be under-recorded due to industrial action in medical records departments at that time.
[4] Provisional

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Listed Underground Stations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list to date the London underground stations that have been granted grade II listed status as buildings of special architectural or historic interest; and for which stations applications are still pending.

Mr. Brooke: The following London underground stations have been listed in grade II:

Acton Town, Arnos Grove, Baker Street, Balham, Barkingside, Baron's Court, Bow Road, Chiswick Park, Clapham Common, Clapham South, Cockfosters, Collier's Wood, Earl's Court, Ealing Common, Eastcote, East Finchley, Farringdon, Fulham Broadway, Gloucester Road, Great Portland Street, Holloway Road, Hounslow West, Kennington, Kilburn Park, Loughton, Maida Vale, Moorgate, Mornington Crescent, Northfields, Notting Hill Gate, Oakwood, Ongar, Osterley, Park Royal, Piccadilly Circus, Rayners Lane, St. James's Park, Southgate, South Wimbledon, Sudbury Hill, Sudbury Town, Tooting Bec, Tooting Broadway, Turnpike Lane, Uxbridge, Wapping (Brunel's tunnel entrance and stairways from platform to street).

There are no outstanding applications for the listing of any other London underground stations.

British Broadcasting Corporation

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage for what purposes the British Broadcasting Corporation has been authorised to broadcast on the 198 KHz frequency; when this authorisation expires or comes up for renewal; and what undertakings or justification the BBC has given regarding its programming policy for broadcasts using this frequency.

Mr. Brooke: It is for the BBC to decide what programmes to broadcast on the frequencies made available to it for services in the United Kingdom, under its present royal charter and licence and agreement, which expire on 31 December 1996.

HEALTH

Primary and Secondary Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the effect on the need for hospital beds of expanding primary care;

(2) what evidence and research her Department has examined on the relationship between the levels of primary and secondary care services.

Dr. Mawhinney: Developments in primary care are only one of the ways in which we can move services closer to the patient's home. These, together with clinical advances leading to shorter lengths of hospital stay and higher rates of day cases, have a significant impact on the number of in-patient beds required. Ultimately, it is for local health authorities, taking account of all these factors and the views of local people, to assess the level of services needed to meet the requirements in their area and to negotiate appropriate provision. We will be examining the changing pattern of service provision to ensure that patients continue to receive effective and high-quality care.

GP Payments

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 14 June *Official Report,* column 376, whether the payments to GPs for out-of-hours service are made from *(a)* family health services authorities cash-limited funds or *(b)* other funds; and in respect of what expenditure such payments are made.

Dr. Mawhinney: The "Statement of Fees and Allowances", copies of which are available in the Library, sets out the conditions for payments to be made to general practitioners from both cash-limited funds and other funds.

Payments are made for a wide range of expenditure, including those associated with providing out-of-hours services.

Civil Servants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average salary of Department of Health civil servants; what is the average salary of the best-paid 20 per cent.; and if she will list the grades and numbers of staff at each grade in her Department.

Mr. Sackville: The average salary of the Department of Health staff, excluding agency and youth treatment service staff, as at 1 May 1994, is £22,365, and the average salary of the best paid 20 per cent. of these staff at the same date is £40,216. Departmental grades and numbers of staff at each grade are shown in the table.

Details of the grades and numbers of staff in the Department of Health and its agencies

Grades	Number in grades (whole-time equivalents) Central department	Agencies and youth treatment service
Grade 1	1·00	—
Grade 1A	2·00	—
Unified Grade 2	9·00	—
Unified Grade 3	23·60	2·00
Unified Grade 4	5·50	3·00
Principal Medical Officer	15·00	2·00
Deputy Chief Nursing Officer	1·60	—
Deputy Chief Inspector SSI	2·00	—
Unified Grade 5	86·98	8·00
Senior Medical Officer	60·50	28·00
Senior Dental Officer	3·00	—
Principal Nursing Officer	3·00	—
Assistant Chief Inspector SSI	16·00	—
Unified Grade 6	57·58	20·00
Medical Officer	1·60	2·00
Nursing Officer	35·10	—
Dental Officer	4·00	—
Senior Principal Research Officer	2·00	—
Senior Pharmaceutical Officer	0·00	10·00
Unified Grade 7	320·83	51·50
Principal Pharmaceutical Officer	9·00	49·00
Inspector SSI	107·00	—
Principal Research Officer	3·75	—
Principal Scientific Officer	11·50	7·00
Principal Professional and Technology Officer	20·50	—
Senior Executive Officer	200·31	28·00
Senior Scientific Officer	21·60	3·00
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	40·00	14·00
Pharmaceutical Officer 1	12·00	17·00
Senior Librarian	5·00	—
Senior Information Officer	10·00	—
Higher Executive Officer	484·24	58·00
Higher Executive Officer (D)	18·00	—
Higher Scientific Officer	17·00	22·00
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	27·50	6·00
Senior Assistant Statistician	10·00	—
Senior Economic Assistant	2·00	—
Librarian	14·50	1·00
Information Officer	16·00	—
Pharmaceutical Officer 2	0·00	7·00
Executive Officer	569·98	151·22
Administrative Trainee	4·00	—
Scientific Officer	11·00	18·00
Professional and Technology Officer	2·00	—
Assistant Statistician	9·60	—
Economic Assistant	3·00	—
Assistant Librarian	9·00	1·00
Assistant Information Officer	4·00	—
Assistant Scientific Officer	1·00	5·00
Administrative Officer	477·03	306·93
Administrative Assistant	161·70	113·89
Sandwich Student	1·00	—
Laboratory Technician	1·50	—
Senior Personal Secretary	66·50	5·00
Personal Secretary	247·79	42·51
Chief Typing Manager	4·00	—
Typing Manager	11·16	2·00
Typist	99·36	22·24
Support Manager 2	0·00	1·00
Support Manager 3	8·00	1·00
Support Grade Band 1	21·00	5·00
Support Grade Band 2	92·10	45·16
Youth Treatment Service Care Staff	0·00	143·00
Youth Treatment Service Industrial Staff	0·00	23·50
Totals	3,484·91	1,255·45

Note: Figures above are Staff in Post as at 1 May 1994.

Stillbirths

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she has taken to reduce the number of stillbirths as a result of obstetric cholestasis.

Mr. Sackville: Following discussions with Department of Health officials, the newsletter of the President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and also that of the Royal College of Midwives have carried items on obstetric cholestasis. The revised edition of the Health Education Authority's "Pregnancy Book" will also carry a reference to obstetric cholestasis.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many stillbirths there were in each of the five most recent years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The number of stillbirths registered in England and Wales by year of occurrence for the period 1988-92 are shown in the table.

Year	Number
1988	3,382
1989	3,236
1990	3,256
1991	3,254
1992	[1]3,160

[1] On 1 October 1992 the legal definition of a stillbirth was altered from baby born dead after 28 completed weeks gestation or more to one born dead after 24 completed weeks gestation or more. Between 1 October and 31 December 1992 there were 216 stillbirths of 24-27 weeks gestation. these are included in the 1992 total.

Children in Care

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list for each local authority in England *(a)* the total number of children in foster care and *(b)* the total number of children in residential care homes; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will list the national average cost for residential child care and for foster care, and for each local authority in England *(a)* the average unit costs for residential child care and *(b)* the average unit cost for foster care; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the numbers of children looked after in residential accommodation and in foster placements at 31 March 1992 and the estimated weekly costs per child, from the publication "Key Indicators of Local Authority Social Services", will be placed in the Library. Care is needed in interpreting the figures because accounting practices vary between local authorities.

NHS Trusts

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has in relation to practising general practitioners, fundholders and non-fundholders, being employed by provider units.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance TEL 94(1), copies of which are available in the Library, has been issued on the appointment of general practitioners as executive directors to the boards of national health service trusts.

Diphtheria

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by year for the last five years, and by regional health authority, the number of cases of diphtheria reported in the age groups *(a)* under 10 years, *(b)* 10 to 19 years and *(c)* 20 years and over.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Number of cases reported to Office of Population Censuses and Surveys of diphtheria, by Regional Health Authority 1988-1992

RHA	Number of cases	Age of patient
1988		
Yorkshire	1	9
1989		
North East Thames	1	11
North West Thames	1	21
1990		
North West Thames	1	19
North Western	1	19
1991		
North East Thames	1	7
South West Thames	1	26
1992		
Northern	1	15
Yorkshire	1	6
East Anglia	2	36 and 37
North West Thames	2	13 and 27
South Western	2	25 and 41

AIDS

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list by regional health authority the allocations made to local authorities in the Yorkshire region for AIDS support in *(a)* 1993-94 and *(b)* 1994-95; and what was the basis of allocations to such authorities in each of these years;

(2) if she will list by regional health authority what allocations were made to local authorities in the Trent region for AIDS support in *(a)* 1993-94 and *(b)* 1994-95; and what was the basis of allocation to such authorities in each of these years.

Mr. Sackville: For 1993-94, AIDS support grant allocations were made on the basis of open-ended bids submitted by local authorities. Local authorities not receiving AIDS support grant were given money under the Healthy Alliances scheme for HIV prevention and joint working with health authorities.

For 1994-95 local authorities were invited to submit expenditure plans against indicative allocations of both AIDS support grant and Healthy Alliances moneys. These allocations were based on confidential information available for the first time and supplied to the Department by the Public Health Laboratory Service on the distribution of AIDS cases by local authority area. Where this formula would mean a reduction in grant in 1994-95, local authorities were advised that there might, in exceptional circumstances, be some scope to adjust allocations on a transitional basis and that applications for additional grant could be made.

The information requested for the Yorkshire and Trent regions is shown in the table:

	Allocations for 1993-94		*Allocations for 1994-95*	
Local authority	*AIDS support grant* £	*Healthy Alliances scheme* £	*AIDS support grant* £	*Healthy Alliances scheme* £
AIDS allocations to local authorities in Yorkshire				
Bradford	0	150,000	71,000	4,000
Calderdale	0	26,000	15,000	3,000
Humberside	0	62,000	32,000	6,000
Kirklees	0	39,000	27,000	5,000
Leeds	267,000	0	101,000	19,000
North Yorkshire	0	31,000	54,000	10,000
Wakefield	0	40,000	15,000	3,000
AIDS allocations to local authorities in Trent				
Barnsley	0	18,000	10,000	7,000
Derbyshire	0	31,000	27,000	5,000
Doncaster	0	31,000	10,000	7,000
Leicestershire	115,000	0	60,000	8,000
Lincolnshire	0	31,000	21,000	4,000
Nottinghamshire	0	48,000	74,000	14,000
Rotherham	0	31,000	10,000	7,000
Sheffield	0	86,000	32,000	6,000

Rural Community Hospitals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priority she attaches to rural community hospitals as part of the care in the community initiative and the NHS reforms.

Mr. Bowis: Both the new community care arrangements and national health service reforms have emphasised that NHS services should be responsive to patient needs. Community hospitals have a useful role to play in some areas in providing a limited range of services to meet local needs.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the names of the persons, together with any relevant experience or qualifications, who have been appointed to the new London ambulance service committee, the terms of reference of that committee, its quorum, to whom it is accountable and if its minutes and agenda will be published; and what financial functions it will perform.

Mr. Sackville: The London ambulance service committee is a sub-committee of South Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Chris Spry, general manager of the authority, for details.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital admissions have been cancelled on more than two occasions within the Wandsworth health authority in each of the last three years.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. Harry Cowd, chairman of the authority, for details.

Child Health Surveillance

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of health authorities have made an assessment of child health surveillance needs in their area.

Mr. Bowis: This information will be available by the end of the year, following research commissioned by the Department.

Diabetics (Disposable Needles)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received concerning the availability of Novofine disposable needles used by diabetics; what is her estimate of their use where available; and what response she has made to representations;

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received during the last 12 months on the subject of the free provision of syringe needle attachments to the novapen used to treat diabetes; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have continued to receive representations about the availability of disposable needles on prescription. Disposable needles must take their place alongside the many other competing claims for national health service funding. The Department does not attempt to collect centrally information about needles purchased privately by diabetics.

NHS Drugs Bill

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage increase in the NHS drugs bill, compared with the previous year, for each year since 1987; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Annual increase in cost of National Health Service drugs

Year	Percentage increase
1987-88	11·3
1988-89	12·5
1989-90	10·9
1990-91	7·8
1991-92	14·5
1992-93	12·6

Fluorosis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority for the last five years, the number of cases of fluorosis that have been reported; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Clinical Standards

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has so far been undertaken by the clinical standards advisory group; what further work is planned; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The group's first report "Access to and Availability of Specialist Services" was published with a Government response in July 1993, copies of which are available in the Library. Further reports on "Diabetes" and "Standards of Clinical Care for Patients Admitted Urgently or as Emergencies" will be published shortly. Reports on "Maternity Services—Women in Normal Labour" and "Back Pain" will be published later this year. The group continues work on reports on "Chronic Schizophrenia", "Dental Anaesthesia" and "Care of the Elderly" for publication next year.

Capitation Allowances

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a report on weighted capitation allocation will be published; and what is her policy on changes in the allocation formula for hospital and community health services for 1995-96.

Mr. Sackville: The review of weighted capitation is still taking place.

Patient Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her Department intends to take action to ensure that staff who raise legitimate concerns about patient care are not bullied into leaving their posts by managers.

Dr. Mawhinney: The guidance—EL(90)51—makes it clear that employees who express views about health care issues in accordance with this guidance are not to be penalised in any way for doing so. A copy is available in the Library.

The responsibility for introducing local procedures to handle such staff concerns lies with each national health service employer.

Health Authorities

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many members of district health authorities are also members of *(a)* county councils, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* London borough councils and *(d)* parish or town councils;

(2) how many members of family health service authorities are also members of *(a)* county councils, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* London borough councils and *(d)* parish or town councils;

(3) how many members of special health authorities are also members of *(a)* county councils, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* London borough councils and *(d)* parish or town councils;

(4) how many members of regional health authorities are also *(a)* members of county councils, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* London borough councils and *(d)* parish or town councils;

(5) how many members of boards of NHS trusts are also *(a)* members of county councils, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* London borough councils and *(d)* parish or town councils.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available centrally.

Community Care Services

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria for independence of potential contractors for community care services which must be met before an organisation is eligible for special transitional grant.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities are required to spend at least 85 per cent. of the Social Security transfer element of the special transitional grant for 1994-95 on community care services provided by the independent sector. The conditions attached to the grant define independent sector expenditure as that amount spent by a local authority on community care services which they arrange to be provided by individuals who are not employed by any local authority under a contract of service or by organisations which are not owned, managed or controlled by any local authority or a combination of local authorities.

Asset Sales

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precepts of the citizens charter govern the disclosure by regional health authorities of the sale price of hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: Details of individual land and property sales are commercially sensitive and exempt from disclosure.

Mortality Rates

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by district health authority the figures for maternal mortality for each of the last two years for which statistics are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information will be placed in the Library.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for major heart surgery in hospitals in the Greater London area as of 14 April.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on waiting times is collected by specialty, district health authority and national health service trust. This information is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Medical Records

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will require hospitals to consult with the patients concerned prior to the destruction of their medical records after the required minimum period of eight years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It would be impractical to require hospitals to trace and consult all patients before the destruction of their personal health records.

The decision as to how long records should be kept is a matter for the hospital concerned, in consultation with health professionals. The minimum periods recommended in departmental guidance HC(89)20 and HSG(94)11, take account of a number of factors, including the potential need for research purposes, the possibility of complaints by patients and the time limits for bringing action in the courts. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Hand Driers

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she has made to the report on hot-air hand driers and paper towels published on 29 March by the University of Westminster.

Mr. Sackville: None. This is a matter for local management.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will publish the Government's response to the Health Select Committee's Report. "Better off in the Community? The Case of People who are Seriously Mentally Ill", HC, 1993-94, 102.

Mr. Bowis: The Government's response, Cm 2588, has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Ashworth Special Hospital

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* patients and *(b)* psychiatrists there were at Ashworth special hospital in June 1990 and June 1994.

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

(a) 652 and 588.

(b) 22 and 25[1].

[1] This figure does not include one honorary consultant and two honorary registrars.

Carers

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many children under the age of 18 years are involved in the part or full-time care of *(a)* elderly relatives, *(b)* people with disabilities and *(c)* other children for the last 10 years for which figures are available;

(2) how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men became involved in the provision of part or full-time care after retirement age;

(3) how many women between the ages of 60 and 65 years became involved in the provision of part or full-time care.

Mr. Bowis: I am not aware of any research into these areas.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of *(a)* women, *(b)* men and *(c)* all adults, between the ages of 18 and 65 years are involved in the full-time care of children under five years on a (i) voluntary and (ii) paid basis for the last 10 years for which figures are available;

(2) what percentage of *(a)* women, *(b)* men and *(c)* all adults, between the ages of 18 and 65 years are involved in the part-time care of children under five years on a (i) voluntary and (ii) paid basis for the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the Department of Education statistical bulletin 11/93 "Pupils under 5 Years of Age in Schools in England—January 1993" and "Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March 1993, England". Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

GP Guidelines (Dispensing of Medicines)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines she has given to GPs who are permitted to provide patients with pharmaceutical services, on the training or qualifications of staff delegated to dispense medicines in their surgeries.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Gammaglobulin

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she takes to ensure that the availability of the vaccine Gammaglobulin is uniform throughout the country; and how many cases of shortfall have been reported to her Department in the last two years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Demand for Gammaglobulin is normally met by manufacturers. The Department is aware of two reports since July 1993 of shortages which were the result of supply problems experienced by manufacturers. The Department is in regular contact with the manufacturers and is continuing to monitor the situation.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the generic drugs prescribed by general medical practitioners which have been tested and found to be qualitatively inferior to the branded products.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Medicines Control Agency under its chief executive, Dr. K. H. Jones. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dr. K. Jones to Mr. Gareth Wardell, dated 22 June 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning generic drugs prescribed by general medical practitioners which have been tested and found to be of inferior quality when compared to branded products from innovator companies.

The Medicines Control Agency is an Executive Agency of the Department of Health responsible for safeguarding public health by licensing medicines and monitoring adverse reaction to drugs.

Generic medicinal products are assessed for safety, quality and efficacy by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) in the same way as innovator products before being granted a product licence. As part of the assessment the applicant is required to provide data showing that the generic product is equivalent or essentially similar to the innovator product.

The MCA has investigated specific complaints about the quality of medicines products by generic companies and found them to be largely unsubstantiated.

The Medicines Testing Scheme (MTS) monitors the quality of licensed medicinal products in the UK by obtaining samples of both generic and innovator products and testing them for compliance with their registered specifications. Comparison of results has not found a higher proportion of deficiencies in generic products when compared with innovator products. This finding is supported by reports of defective medicines to the Defective Medicines Report Centre which are no greater for generic than for innovator products.

Whilst deficiencies do occasionally occur in both generic and innovator products, there is no evidence from the results of testing carried out by the MTS over the past two years to suggest that generic medicines are of inferior quality compared with the equivalent innovator products.

TREASURY

Financial Statistics

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the total taxation levied by the Government in each year since 1964 in real terms, *(b)* the total annual Government expenditure for each of those years in real terms and *(c)* the annual inflation rate for each year since 1964.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is shown in the table.

Government Taxes and Expenditure

Year	1 Total taxes and NICs Nominal (£ billion)	2 Total taxes and NICs Real (£ billion 1990-91)	3 GGE (excluding pps) Nominal (£ billion)	4 GGE (excluding pps) Real (£ billion 1990-91)	5 GDP deflator inflation (per cent.)
1964-65	10·1	92·6	12·3	112·9	4·5
1965-66	11·4	100·2	13·6	119·2	4·8
1966-67	12·4	104·6	15·1	127·0	4·2
1967-68	13·7	11·22	17·5	143·0	2·9
1968-69	15·7	122·2	18·2	141·6	5·1
1969-70	17·7	130·8	19·3	142·7	5·2
1970-71	19·3	131·9	21·6	147·5	8·2
1971-72	20·6	128·7	24·4	152·7	9·1
1972-73	21·9	126·6	27·6	159·7	8·2
1973-74	24·9	134·8	32	173·2	6·9
1974-75	31·8	144·0	42·9	194·1	19·6
1975-76	40·1	144·5	53·8	194·1	25·4
1976-77	46·3	147·3	59·6	189·4	13·5
1977-78	52·3	146·3	64·4	180·2	13·6
1978-79	58·6	147·4	75	188·7	11·2
1979-80	72·8	157·0	90·4	194·9	16·7
1980-81	85·9	156·5	108·8	198·2	18·3
1981-82	102·2	169·7	121	201·0	9·7
1982-83	110·6	171·6	133·1	206·4	7·1
1983-84	118·9	176·2	141·6	209·9	4·6
1984-85	129·3	182·4	152·8	215·6	5·0
1985-86	139·3	186·2	11·2	21·5	5·5
1986-87	147·1	191·1	169·3	219·9	2·9
1987-88	163·1	201·2	178·4	220·0	5·3
1988-89	178·0	205·7	186·9	216·0	6·7
1989-90	191·4	206·8	205	221·5	7·0
1990-91	205·4	205·4	223·5	223·5	8·1
1991-92	210·8	198·3	244·1	229·6	6·3
1992-93	208·7	189·0	269·2	243·7	3·9
1993-94	215·6	189·4	277	243·3	3·3

Notes:
Columns 1,2 Nominal and Real tax burden=Taxes on income+taxes on capital+taxes on expenditure+social security contributions+rates/community charge/council tax+royalties.
Columns 3,4 Nominal and Real general government expenditure excluding privatisation proceeds.
Column 5 growth rate in GDP deflator series, which is used to deflate the Nominal series in columns 1 and 2.

Alcohol

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the issue of the harmonisation of EU excise duties on alcohol at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Sir John Cope: The issue of excise duties on alcohol will be placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers when studies being undertaken by the Commission in accordance with article 8 of Council directive 92/84/EEC have been completed. This may be in time for the next meeting, but if not it will be raised at a later meeting.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to introduce additional measures to prevent illegal importation of alcohol for resale;

(2) if he will initiate a review of measures which are taken in order to prevent the illegal importation of alcohol for resale.

Sir John Cope: Customs has deployed additional staff and taken other measures to counter the threat posed by the illegal importation of alcohol for resale. Customs is continually reviewing its methods and effectiveness in tackling this issue.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to harmonise United Kingdom excise duties on alcohol with those in the rest of the EC.

Sir John Cope: Member states should be free to set the rates that they feel are appropriate to their own particular circumstances, subject only to the agreed minimum rates. That was the basis of the agreement reached by all member states at ECOFIN on 19 October 1992.

Children

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product is currently spent on children aged under six.

Mr. Nelson: This information is not available.

Personal Investment Authority

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the Personal Investment Authority.

Mr. Nelson: The Securities and Investments Board is today announcing that it has decided to recognise the Personal Investment Authority as a self-regulating organisation, and as a self-regulating organisation for friendly societies under the Financial Services Act 1986.

The Treasury has given SIB leave under the FSA to recognise the PIA. That decision was reached after receiving two reports from the Director General of Fair Trading. Both reports concluded that the rules and guidance submitted by the PIA do not, and are not intended nor are likely to have, significantly anti-competitive effects. Having considered the DGFT's report, I have

concluded that there is no impediment to the Treasury giving the leave sought by SIB. The DTI and the Friendly Societies Commission, as the prudential regulators for insurance companies and friendly societies respectively, have also certified that they are satisfied that the PIA may be recognised.

The PIA will regulate and supervise all types of retail financial services business covered by the FSA. This includes selling of life insurance and regulated collective investment schemes as well as independent financial advice. The PIA will aim for high standards of regulatory compliance so as to improve investor protection. It will start work as a regulator on 18 July.

SIB is today also giving notice of the revocation of recognition of two existing regulators, the Financial Intermediaries Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association, and the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation. The PIA will cover the parts of business which those SROs now regulate and SIB has concluded that it is undesirable for those SROs to continue to operate now that the PIA is to be recognised.

Brewing Industry (Cross Channel Trade)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the effect upon British brewers of cross channel trading.

Sir John Cope: I have received a number of representations on this subject which have mostly been made public. I have also noted other public statements not specifically sent to us.

Building Societies

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to announce the results of his review of legislation affecting building societies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I hope to announce the results of this review shortly.

Bank Notes (Demand)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has about the effects on the demand for bank notes of the rise in part-time employment.

Mr. Nelson: It is not possible to assess whether there is any effect of part-time employment on the demand for bank notes.

Inland Revenue Requirements

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures he has in place to ensure that employers paying their employees in cash comply with Inland Revenue requirements for the deduction of tax and national insurance contributions.

Mr. Dorrell: The duties of employers to deduct tax and national insurance contributions are set out in regulations and the Inland Revenue makes every effort through penalties, interest and collection procedures to pursue such deductions if they are not paid.

Top-rate Taxpayers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the number of top rate taxpayers in *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1994-95, giving estimates where necessary (i) in absolute terms and (ii) as a percentage of the total number of income taxpayers and also the change as between 1989-90 and 1994-95 (1) in absolute terms and (2) as a percentage change.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* The information is as follows:

	1989-90	*1994-95*
Number of higher rate taxpayers (thousands)	[1]1,500	2,300
Higher rate taxpayers as a percentage of total individuals paying income tax	6	9
Change in higher rate taxpayers between 1989-90 and 1994-95	*(Thousands)* 800	*(Per cent.)* 53

[1] Prior to independent taxation married couples are treated as one taxpayer.

Brewing Industry

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *295*, if he will make a statement about the information on the regional distribution of duty-paid imports of beer given to him by the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association, and the conclusions he has drawn from this information.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 21 June 1994]:* Individuals from anywhere in the United Kingdom may purchase duty-paid beer for their own use in other member states of the European Union. We have not sought to verify information on the regional distribution of legal duty-paid imports on beer compiled by the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association, although we have noted the conclusions.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *295*, if he will make a further statement on the involvement of organised crime in the illegal sale of duty-paid imports of beer.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 21 June 1994]:* There is no evidence of large-scale organised crime being involved so far in this illegal activity. Anyone who has evidence of such activity should contact Customs and Excise.

Defence Costs Study

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs will be cut as a result of the defence costs studies; and when implementation of these will begin.

Mr. Aitken: No final decisions have been taken on the recommendations of the defence costs study and it is not possible therefore to say how large a reduction in employment will result. Where proposals would affect employment, the normal consultation procedures will be followed before final decisions are reached. Implementation will begin once decisions are taken.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that the timetable for cuts in the defence budget being considered under the defence costs studies will allow for consultation with trade unions and local and regional authorities.

Mr. Aitken: Proposals emerging from the defence costs study will be subject to consultation with the trade unions in the normal manner and will also be notified to other interested parties.

RAF No. 1312 flight

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many crews and aircraft are currently deployed with No. 1312 Flight Royal Air Force; and what changes have been made to these force levels since 1992.

Mr. Hanley: There are three crews and two Hercules C-Mark 1Ks currently deployed with No. 1312 Flight Royal Air Force. No changes have been made to these force levels since 1992.

Low flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the hang-gliding site on Farleton fell, near Kendal, Cumbria, is marked as an avoidance area on the low-flying charts used by Royal Air Force aircrew; and what is the grid reference of the datum point of this site.

Mr. Hanley: The hang-gliding site at Farleton is not designated as an avoidance area. It is however, marked on military low-flying charts and is listed as a warning in the United Kingdom military low flying handbook. The grid reference is N54 42.04 W002 42.13 (SD 542800).

Helicopters

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the Royal Air Force rules governing flight by helicopters not equipped for instrument flying into areas where the forecast or actual weather conditions are below visual flight rules minima.

Mr. Hanley: All RAF helicopters are equipped for instrument flying.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Chinook HC2 helicopter received full clearance from the controller aircraft for flight in instrument meteorological conditions.

Mr. Hanley: CA Release for the Chinook Hc Mk II aircraft type to fly in instrument meteorological conditions was issued on 9 November 1993.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the forecast weather conditions in the vicinity of Cape Nero, Italy, on 9 September 1993 as provided to the crew of the Royal Air Force Gazelle helicopter which crashed on that date.

Mr. Hanley: The weather forecast for the route between Forsinone, Italy and Dijon, France indicated a general cloud base of 2,000 ft with a visibility of 7 to 10 km reducing to 4 km in rain and mist with a small probability of thunderstorms.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the expected publication date of the report of the investigation into the collision between a Royal Air Force Tornado and a civilian helicopter over Cumbria on 23 June 1993.

Mr. Hanley: The air accident investigation branch of the Department of Transport published its report of this collision on 7 June 1994. A summary of the RAF board of inquiry will be published shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the administrative action taken against the crew of the Gazelle helicopter which crashed on 9 September 1993.

Mr. Hanley: It is not my Department's policy to reveal details of administrative action taken against RAF personnel involved in flying incidents, although action is taken wherever it is considered appropriate.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations, operating units and types of radar equipment forming the Falkland Islands air defence ground environment.

Mr. Hanley: It is not our practice to release operational information of this nature.

Bosnia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many interceptions of aircraft apparently breaching the Bosnian no-fly zone have been made by Royal Air Force Tornado F3s during Operation Deny Flight; and if he will make a statement on the circumstances of each such interception.

Mr. Hanley: Operation Deny Flight is the NATO operation to monitor and enforce the air exclusion zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina. NATO's operational incident statistics for this task are not broken down by national aircraft, nor are separate records kept on the nature of each incident.

Tornado (Navigation System)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Royal Air Force Tornado GR1 fleet is currently equipped with the NAVSTAR global positioning system.

Mr. Aitken: Of the 96 established aircraft and eight in-use reserves on front-line Tornado GR1 squadrons, 43 aircraft are currently GPS-capable. For the future, we plan to integrate GPS equipment to all aircraft upgraded under the Tornado MLU programme.

Chile (Military Equipment)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contacts or meetings Ministers or officials of his Department, or the Defence Exports Sales Organisation, had with General Pinochet of Chile in regard to military equipment sales during his recent visit.

Mr. Aitken: None.

RAF Brize Norton

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what reasons soldiers are required to go to South Cerney, near Cirencester, when they are flying from RAF Brize Norton;

(2) how long, on average, soldiers have to report to South Cerney, near Cirencester, before their flight from RAF Brize Norton.

Mr. Hanley: South Cerney is the air mounting centre for United Kingdom-based service units deploying on operations and exercises. It is centrally placed between the RAF's two main air transport bases of RAF Brize Norton and RAF Lyneham and offers facilities not available at either, such as an operations suite, briefing rooms and sufficient holding areas for men and equipment up to brigade size.

Passengers flying from RAF Brize Norton on operations and exercises report to South Cerney an average of four hours before their estimated departure. This allows time for processing, baggage checks, feeding and travel to the airfield.

Policy Study

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that implementation of the Blelloch report will not lead to a reduction in the staffing of the newly formed MOD Guard Service.

Mr. Hanley: Sir John Blelloch's work is concerned with the MOD police and his review which was announced on 15 December, *Official Report,* column *739,* has yet to report. The report which he submitted as part of "Front Line First" is being considered in conjunction with other defence costs study reports, including one on the general subject of security. We hope to make an announcement on the study as a whole, including our proposals for implementation, before the summer recess.

Anti-personnel Mines

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) of 13 May, *Official Report,* column *288,* if anti-personnel mines come into the category of inhumane weapons covered by the United Nations inhumane weapons convention.

Mr. Aitken: The United Nations weaponry convention governs the use of certain conventional weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects. Protocol II of the convention contains prohibitions and restrictions on the use of mines, booby traps and other devices. The use of anti-personnel mines would be covered by this protocol.

Research Funding

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list universities and former polytechnics at which the Ministry of Defence has funded research in the last five years.

Mr. Aitken: I am arranging for the list placed in the Library of the House in May 1992 to be updated to reflect changes since then.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has considered changing his policy on making public details of research projects funded by the Ministry in universities.

Mr. Aitken: It has been and remains our consistent policy not to publish such details.

Low-Flying Training, Goose Bay

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for RAF Harrier GR7 aircraft to carry out low-flying training at Canadian forces base Goose Bay.

Mr. Hanley: There are currently no plans to deploy Harrier GR7s to Goose bay for low-flying training. It is, however, possible that Harrier GR7s while staging through Goose bay en route to other North American detachment locations might conduct some low-flying training should the opportunity arise.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year the last Royal Air Force Vulcan deployment to Canadian forces base Goose bay for low-level training took place.

Mr. Hanley: In 1982.

Cambridge Military Hospital

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the restrictions on admissions to the Cambridge military hospital in Aldershot, Hampshire have yet been lifted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Cambridge military hospital, Aldershot restricted routine in-patient admissions from 16 to 26 May as a precautionary measure following the identification among new patients of the Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus bacteria. The GPs of all patients affected by cancellation of appointments were notified of the reasons behind this restriction, which had the approval of the local NHS consultant in communicable disease control. Neighbouring hospitals were also kept informed of the situation.

The MRSA bacteria was systematically cleared from the hospital and no patients or staff developed any symptoms of MRSA infection. The hospital reopened for routine and emergency admissions from noon on 25 May and elective surgical lists resumed on 26 May 1994. The out-patients department and the maternity wing remained open throughout, while the accident and emergency department stayed open for out-patient cases and emergencies which, could not be safely transferred to other hospitals.

F15E Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the report on the measurement of noise levels of the F15E aircraft is now complete; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. Hanley: The report is now complete and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Exercise Diver Mist

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the hon. Member for Don Valley may be sent a de-classified copy of the report evaluating the nuclear weapons accident Exercise Diver Mist held on 18 to 22 April in East Anglia, when it has been completed.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 25 April, *Official Report*, columns *84-85*.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much advance warning was given to each of the civil and emergency authorities who participated in the Diver Mist nuclear weapons accident exercise on 18 to 22 April in East Anglia; and what is the significance of its title.

Mr. Hanley: Representatives of relevant emergency services and local authorities were formally involved in exercise planning from September 1993. The name of the exercise was, as normal, part of a randomly generated series and has no significance.

ENVIRONMENT

Sewers

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average life expectancy of sewers which were constructed prior to the Water Act 1973.

Mr. Atkins: It is for the water company to determine whether a sewer requires replacement. I understand advances in repair and renovation techniques are having the effect of enabling sewers to continue in use after the date at which reconstruction would have been expected to have been required in earlier years.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the actual expenditure on sewerage infrastructure renewal for each water company for each year since 1989 and the total to date;

(2) when he was informed of the £424 million accrued underspend of sewerage infrastructure renewal moneys in the water industry annual accounts;

(3) if he will list chronologically the representations he has received on the requirements of infrastructure renewal in the water industry, indicating which responses to them have been made public;

(4) what is the total accrued national infrastructure renewal charge to date shown in the water industry annual accounts for each water service company.

Mr. Atkins: In order to spread the cost to customers, the Secretaries of State decided at privatisation in 1989 to limit spending on infrastructure renewal in the short term and to build up a liability in the accounts to spend the money at a later date. The Director General of Water Services is responsible for monitoring water companies' spending on infrastructure renewal. Details of the industry's spending on infrastructure renewal are published each year in Ofwat's "Report on Capital Investment and Financial Performance of the Water Companies in England and Wales", copies of which have been placed in the Library. Information on individual companies' expenditure on infrastructure renewal can be obtained from the appointed business accounts which are available from the Ofwat library. Representations on infrastructure renewal in the water industry were received from the Severn Renovation Federation in 1993; the response was not made public, but the industry's spending plans have been in the public domain since 1989.

Water Industry

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the assumption of reasonable return on capital as defined in the Water Industry Act 1991 for *(a)* the water supply companies and *(b)* the water service companies.

Mr. Atkins: When price limits were set by the Secretaries of State in 1989 they assumed that a reasonable return on capital would be: *(a)* a real return of 8 per cent. for most of the water supply companies, 8·5 per cent. for the smallest companies, and *(b)* a real return of 7 per cent. for the water service companies.

The Director General of Water Services is currently considering the appropriate return on capital as part of his periodic review of price limits. In the consultation paper "Cost of Capital", published in 1991, he suggested that the appropriate range was between 5 and 6 per cent. He will announce the outcome of his review on 28 July 1994.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the land sale transactions he has approved by each water company, *(a)* since the Water Act 1989 and *(b)* since 1 February 1992.

Mr. Atkins: Details of such land sales are not registered with the Secretary of State.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has issued to water companies as to the proper procedures under section 10 of the Reservoirs Act 1975 for the appointment of an independent qualified civil engineer; and whether consideration can be given under these procedures to the appointment of former employees of the water company in question.

Mr. Atkins: DOE circular 5/85 set out general guidance on the operation of the Reservoirs Act 1975, including the appointment of qualified engineers. Section 10(9) of the Act requires that independent qualified engineers

> (a) shall not be in the employment of the reservoir undertaker otherwise than in a consultant capacity; and
> (b) shall not have been the engineer responsible for the reservoir or any addition to it as construction engineer, and shall not be connected with such an engineer as his partner, employer, employee or fellow employee in a civil engineering business.

Housing

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the scope of his powers to allocate specific moneys to local authorities and housing associations to deal with the problems of Orlit, Whitsun-Fairhurst and other dwelling types with major structural defects; how much he has allocated to local authorities and housing associations in England to deal with these problems in each of the past 10 years; how many

houses classified as having major structural defencts have been dealt with due to central Government funding during the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Section 569 of the Housing Act 1985 empowers the Secretary of State to contribute to expenses incurred by local authoriteis in assisting eligible owners of the 24 dwelling types which have been designated in England under section 528 of the Act. The Whitson-Fairhurst type has been designated in Scotland only. Contributions are payable on audited claims made by authorities in the year after the expenses were incurred. The table shows for each of the past 10 years: *(a)* the total number of dwellings dealt with, as reported by local authorities; *(b)* the Government's contributions to annual loan charges incurred by local authorities on dwellings dealt with before 1 April 1989; and *(c)* the capital grants made to authorities from 1 April 1990 on dwellings dealt with on or after 1 April 1989. Housing associations are not responsible for administering the scheme of assistance.

	(a) Dwellings dealt with, reported by local authorities	*(b) Contributions to annual loan charges incurred by local authorities £ million*	*(c) Capital grants paid to local authorities from 1 April 1990 £ million*
1984-85	162	—	—
1985-86	2,489	0·003	—
1986-87	2,909	1·987	—
1987-88	3,707	4·870	—
1988-89	3,837	8·824	—
1989-90	3,298	16·363	—
1990-91	2,843	17·192	54·544
1991-92	2,419	16·621	63·038
1992-93	1,523	2·785	54·305
1993-94	[1]1,351	[1]32·631	[1]54·464

[1] Provisional.

Office Accommodation, Johnstone

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Property Services Agency has for the utilisation or disposal of the premises formerly and currently occupied by the Benefits Agency at Floors street, Johnstone; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Crown building, Floors street, Johnstone, is occupied by the Benefits Agency, which expects to be moving out once it has set up a new customer service point in the area. There are no other Government demands for this space and, as soon as the Benefits Agency has confirmed its intended date of vacation, this freehold property will be offered for sale on the open market.

Royal Yacht Britannia

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what hire charge is being paid by the London Docklands development corporation for the hire of the royal yacht Britannia for its reception on 29 June; and what is the estimated additional cost of the actual reception.

Sir George Young: No hire charge is being paid by the London Docklands Development Corporation. The estimated additional cost of the reception is £3,500.

Homelessness

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has consulted with social security Ministers about the recent CHAR report about the bare necessities, the experience of homeless people and the discretionary social fund.

Sir George Young: There has been no consultation at ministerial level about this report, which I understand that CHAR published on 15 June. However, my officials are in discussion with colleagues in the Department of Social Security on this and related matters.

Urban Regeneration

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total amount of expenditure given for urban regeneration in the Greater London area; and if he will list the local authorities that have received funding and the amounts received.

Mr. Baldry: The total amount of expenditure given for urban regeneration in the Greater London area in the current year is £296·967 million. This amount is made up from the following programmes—estate action, urban programme, city challenge, task forces, housing action trusts, city grant, funding for the London Docklands development corporation and derelict land grant.

Individual total amounts for each local authority are listed below:

1994-95 expenditure provision for urban regeneration for London

Borough	*Total (£ thousands)*
Barking and Dagenham	0
Barnet	450
Bexley	0
Brent	11,851
Bromley	0
Camden	4,330
Croydon	0
Ealing	2,000
Enfield	831
Greenwich	2,030
Hackney	18,921
Hammersmith/Fulham	4,834
Haringey	9,187
Harrow	0
Havering	0
Hillingdon	0
Hounslow	7,756
Islington	5,397
Kensington/Chelsea	9,876
Kingston upon Thames	0
Lambeth	19,773
Lewisham	21,174
Merton	900
Newham	55,309
Redbridge	700
Richmond	500
Southwark	19,437
Sutton	64
Tower Hamlets	59,784
Waltham Forest	36,700
Wandsworth	963
Westminster	1,500
Total	[1]294,267
Grand Total	296,967

[1] Plus 2,700 for Derelict Land Grant not broken down above on an individual borough basis.

Climate Change

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *339*, what is the precise content of the full contribution beyond 2000 for the United Kingdom's climate change programme to which he refers.

Mr. Atkins: Decisions on this have not yet been taken.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage public sector landlords to provide disabled people with personal housing plans; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Decisions about the allocation of public sector housing are a matter for individual housing authorities, taking into account all their powers and duties under housing legislation. For people with community care needs, social services departments and housing authorities are asked to construct an individual's care plan with the objective of preserving or restoring non-institutional living as far as possible, and of securing the most appropriate and cost-effective package of care, housing and other services to meet the person's future needs.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce new building regulations and amend existing building regulations, to promote the development of barrier-free housing in terms of *(a)* new-build and *(b)* renovated or modernised properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment intends, in conjunction with the Secretary of State for Wales, to consult on a range of building regulation provisions which could be applied to the design of new dwellings for the benefit of disabled people. There are no plans to consider the application of such requirements to existing dwellings subject to renovation or modernisation.

Timber

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to resist any boycott or ban of any timber species used in the United Kingdom;

(2) what action his Department is taking to ensure that no boycott or ban of any timber species is allowed to be specified in any building contracts that involve public funding;

(3) whether it is current Government policy that no timber should be discriminated against on environmental grounds.

Mr. Atkins: In terms of trade between countries, the treaty of Rome requires that all matters be dealt with by the European Community as a whole. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which is implemented within the Community under EC regulation 3626/82, controls and monitors international trade in many species of plants and animals, including some species of tree.

As to materials within the United Kingdom, my Department is committed in its own green housekeeping policy statement to encourage sustainable forest practices which maintain the biodiversity, productivity and ecological habitats of woodlands. This is reflected in our recently published guide for suppliers of goods and services to the Department, "Selling to DOE", which encourages suppliers to provide joinery, furniture and fittings manufactured only from wood produced from sustainably managed forests. There are no bans on any particular species.

Home Improvements

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Government will review the arrangements under which grant is paid to home improvement agencies before deciding whether to extend them beyond 1994-95.

Sir George Young: When we introduced the home improvement agency grant programme in 1991, we made it clear that the arrangements were for four years only in the first instance with any further decisions being taken following a review. We propose to carry out that review this year so that any changes considered necessary can take effect from April 1995. The review will need to consider issues such as the extent to which agencies have met their prime objective of helping people carry out building work to their home; the benefits of the service to both clients and practitioners—especially local authorities—and the need for any change in the nature or range of the service offered. I have today placed in the Library a copy of a letter which my Department has sent to a number of organisations involved with the work of home improvement agencies inviting written representations. We will be happy to receive views in writing from anyone else who wishes to contribute. We hope to announce our main conclusions from the review by the autumn.

Audit Commission

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the relationship between the Audit Commission and his Department, and the other Departments which sponsor the Commission's work.

Mr. Gummer: The Department of the Environment, the Welsh Office and the Department of Health sponsor the Audit Commission. A joint framework document—"Accounting for Independent Audit"—which sets out the relationships between the Audit Commission and its sponsors, and between the sponsor Departments themselves, has been published today. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library.

National Parks

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his timetable for the introduction of legislation to establish the national parks as independent boards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 21 June 1994]:* The Local Government (Wales) Bill will allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to establish joint or special planning boards for the three national parks in Wales. However, it is our intention to introduce legislation to establish independent authorities for all 10 national parks in England and Wales as soon as there is a suitable opportunity to do so.

EMPLOYMENT

Acquired Rights Directive

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the cost of the compensation which could be secured in consequence of the various proceedings initiated by the EC Commission in consequence of the acquired rights directive; and if he will investigate the possibility of reducing public expenditure by establishing a programme for settling claims.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government do not believe that any significant claims for compensation resulting from those proceedings will be substantiated.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the consequences in terms of policy of the various actions initiated by the EC Commission against the United Kingdom on the application of the acquired rights directive; and what steps he will take to advise persons who might be entitled to compensation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All but one of the issues raised by the Commission have already been dealt with by amendments to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993. The only outstanding issue concerns arrangements for consultation about proposed transfers. The Government are still considering the judgment on that point.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what liability is accepted by the Government for the costs already paid out by private employers in consequence of the legislation stemming from the acquired rights directive in light of the terms of the court decisions in the EC.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Courts and tribunals take account of relevant decisions by the European Court of Justice in interpreting national implementing legislation. It is for individual employees and employers to take their own legal advice on the effect of national or European law.

Employment and Investment Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on employment and investment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government strongly support the report's conclusions that all industrialised economies need to adapt more rapidly to change than they have done in the past 20 years through increased labour market flexibility and that attempts to slow the pace of change through erecting barriers to trade or regulations to preserve existing patterns of employment will damage prosperity and employment in the long run. That strategy is very much in line with the policies which the Government have been pursuing for the past 15 years and which have brought us a rapid reduction in unemployment, including long-term unemployment.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) any other services in 1980 to 1983, 1984 to 1987, 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Disabled People (Employment)

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the level of compliance of each local authority with the requirements of the statutory quota scheme for the employment of disabled persons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Tables of figures showing the number and percentage of registered disabled people employed by a wide range of public sector employers, including local authorities, are published annually in the *Employment Gazette*, with the agreement of the employers concerned. The latest available figures relating to 1 June 1992 were published in the April 1993 gazette, a copy of which is in the Library.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in manufacturing industry in Greater London and Redbridge in 1979 and 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is given in the following table:

Employees in manufacturing industry

Thousands

	Greater London	*Redbridge*
September 1981	681	13
September 1991	359	6
December 1993	322	[1]—

[1] Not available.

Between 1981 and 1993 manufacturing output in the United Kingdom rose by 21·5 per cent.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufactured Exports, East Midlands

4. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of Britain's manufactured exports originate in the east midlands.

Mr. Needham: Export figures are compiled on a national and not a regional basis. The east midlands contributed fully to last year's record export performance, when our visible exports totalled £121 billion.

Association of South-East Asian Nations

19. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to promote trade with the ASEAN countries.

Mr. Needham: My Department now has in place a wide range of measures to promote trade with the ASEAN countries. These include the appointment of five export promoters from the private sector, who work with teams of officials to provide first-hand advice and assistance to British companies exporting to the ASEAN bloc.

Competitiveness

21. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role he sees for further reform on intellectual property rights in his programme to improve the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The United Kingdom is a country which depends on innovation to maintain its competitiveness. Strong protection for intellectual property around the world is therefore important to British industry. The Government were pleased that the recent GATT agreement provides minimum standards of protection and enforcement and we will be seeking to ensure that the agreement is implemented as fully and widely as possible. We will continue to seek improved protection through harmonisation of laws at European and international level.

33. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the United Kingdom's competitiveness with the emerging newly industrialised countries.

Mr. Eggar: The United Kingdom's competitiveness both with the newly industrialising countries and with other developed economies is analysed in the Government's recent White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win".

26. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next proposes to meet the Institute of Directors to discuss industrial competitiveness.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer to the answer my hon. Friend gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

24. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on his White Paper on Competitiveness.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) earlier today.

Director's Share Options (Disclosure)

22. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to improve disclosure of director's share options.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: None. However, proposals are contained in the exposure draft of the urgent issues task force of the Accounting Standards Board published on 19 May. The draft is open for comment until 8 July.

Manufacturing Industry

25. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of jobs in manufacturing *(a)* in June 1979 and *(b)* at the latest available date.

Mr. McLoughlin: Manufacturing employment has been on a downward trend in the developed world for many years. The number of employees in employment in United Kingdom manufacturing industry was 7·3 million in June 1979 and 4·3 million in March 1994. The fall in manufacturing employment since 1979 reflects structural changes and sharply increased productivity.

27. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to boost manufacturing investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since 1979, investment in plant and machinery has risen by over 50 per cent. Further investment will be encouraged by the profitable and competitive manufacturing base which our policies are designed to maintain.

32. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the percentage change in manufacturing output since 1979 and the figures for Germany, Japan and the United States of America.

Mr. Eggar: Since 1979, manufacturing output increased by 5 per cent. in the United Kingdom; 14 per cent. in West Germany; 43 per cent. in Japan; and 38 per cent. in the United States of America. However the comparison is affected by the timing of the economic cycle. Between 1981 and 1992—similar points in the economic cycle—United Kingdom manufacturing output grew by over a fifth.

Aircraft Industry

28. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the European Union about protecting the interests of European aircraft industries.

Mr. McLoughlin: Ministers and officials at my Department have a continuing dialogue on the competitiveness of the European aerospace industry with our partners in the major European aerospace programmes such as airbus.

Post Office

29. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what responses he has received so far on his Green Paper on the Future of the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Green Paper has not yet been published. However, we have received a number of representations since my right hon. Friend's statement on 19 May expressing a range of views on the future of the Post Office.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he was consulted about statements made by the Post Office chief executive on privatisation.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Post Office board is entirely free to comment in public on issues concerning the future of its business.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to publish his consultation paper on the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: Shortly.

Shipbuilding Industry

30. **Ms Quin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next intends to discuss with his EU counterparts the future of the shipbuilding industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry is meeting EU counterparts today, when he attends a meeting of the Industry Council, to discuss shipbuilding affairs.

31. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the future prospects for the shipbuilding industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My officials are constantly in touch with representatives of the shipbuilding industry about their plans and prospects. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and other Ministers recently met leading representatives of the industy to hear their reports and discuss their industry's future.

Deregulation

34. **Ms Ruddock:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's deregulation initiative.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The booklet "Deregulation—Cutting Red Tape", copies of which are available in the Library of the House, was published in January, setting out the aims and achievements of the deregulation initiative to date. Since then further developments have included:

The completion of the departmental reviews of their regulations. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has recently submitted a report to the Prime Minister on the results of this.

There are now 873 regulations earmarked for amendment or repeal, and 359 of the task forces' 605 recommendations have now been accepted and work is being taken forward by the new task force under the chairmanship of Francis Maude.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill has now completed its passage through the Commons and is currently before another place.

The review of fire safety regulations has now submitted its report to the Government. We are considering its recommendations and how to proceed regarding publication.

We continue to work with the European Commission and other member states to ensure that deregulation is at the heart of European policy making and that all new EC proposals are fully justified in terms of their costs and benefits.

Telecommunications Industry

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to vary the ban on British Telecom and Mercury providing entertainment services via their national networks; what representation he has received regarding the ban; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: British Telecom and Mercury have precisely the same opportunities as other companies to provide entertainment services, through holding interests in franchises to provide cable television. The Government are committed to maintaining their policies on these matters, as set out in chapter 5 of the 1991 telecommunications White Paper. We have received correspondence on aspects of these policies from a variety of sources, and I have recently explained the justification for our policies to the Trade and Industry Select Committee.

Steel Industry Subsidies, Italy

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will take action to secure the withdrawal by the European Commission of subsidies being paid by the Italian Government to that country's steel industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government will continue to press the Commission to take firm action against any subsidies paid by the Italian Government to their steel industry which are not permissible under the European Coal and Steel Community treaty or the steel aids code.

Machine Tools

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the latest figures for imports and exports of machine tools between the United Kingdom and Japan, Germany and Italy.

Mr. Needham: The information is provided in the table:

United Kingdom trade in machine tools[1] for 1993
(£ million, current prices)

Country	*Imports*	*Exports*
Japan	106·9	9·2
Germany	122·7	43·4
Italy	38·1	14·6

[1] Machine tools and their parts are defined as headings 728, 733 and 735 of the Standard International Trade Classification.
Source: HM Customs and Excise.

Disabled People

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce a requirement that company annual reports should include a statement of their level of compliance with the statutory quota for the employment of disabled persons.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no plans to do so. The Companies Act 1985 already requires companies with more than 250 employees to include in their directors' report a statement describing their policy applied during the financial year for the employment of disabled persons.

Coal Industry

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will announce the site of the headquarters of the Coal Authority.

Mr. Eggar: The Government gave a commitment in their coal review White Paper that the headquarters of the Coal Authority would be located in Nottinghamshire. I announced yesterday in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) *Official Report*, column *83*, the initial accommodation arrangements being made for the authority pending its own consideration of longer term arrangements. The authority's headquarters will be located at 200 Lichfield land, Berry Hill, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, which British Coal Opencast will also continue to use for the time being. The authority will additionally take over British Coal's abandoned mine plans facility at Bretby in Staffordshire, and co-locate certain associated functions.

Fire Safety

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the review of fire safety legislation and enforcement he announced on 17 January has produced its report; whether it will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The review team submitted its report to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for the Environment and myself on 24 May. We are publishing the report today and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The review team has carried out a thorough evaluation of the present system and identified a number of potential improvements. Since January, the review team has undertaken widespread consultation with all interested parties. It has found that there is an overlap in present legislation and that enforcement arrangements may impose burdens on businesses and create avoidable uncertainty. Enforcement responsibilities are sometimes blurred. This makes more difficult the task of enforcing the legislation and co-ordinating the activities of the various enforcers.

The report puts forward a number of proposals which the review team believes would reduce burdens on business and introduce greater clarity into the system without undermining safety standards. These recommendations are now under consideration by Ministers. No decisions have yet been taken and we are committed to full consultation before any proposals for changing the existing arrangements are made. We would welcome the views of interested parties. We shall be consulting those organisations with a known interest in this matter for their views by 31 October 1994.

The review team has risen well to the challenge, and we expect that greater clarity and simpler arrangements will improve standards of fire safety.

Lloyd's

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when Lloyd's passed the annual solvency test.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The statement and certificates demonstrating Lloyd's solvency for the year ended December 1992, which are required by part IV of the Insurance Companies Act 1982, were received by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade at the end of August 1993. The corresponding documentation in respect of the year ended December 1993 should be delivered this August.

Inward Investment

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next intends to convene a conference of representatives of overseas investors to discuss locating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau regularly holds seminars in its major overseas markets. These are always well attended.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those activities within his Department which have been, or are subject to market testing; those activities which have been awarded to private contractors; those cases in which external consultants have been employed and the total cost of consultancy fees in relation to market testing.

Mr. Eggar: A full list of activities subject to market testing in 1992-93 and 1993-94 was published in the citizens charter first and second reports, Cm. 2101 and Cm. 2540 respectively. To date, the private sector has been awarded contracts within the following areas: the offshore geology programme, office and support services, and training. External consultants have been employed to support market testing of the activities listed in the reports with the exception of oil and gas royalties, ship radio licensing, outward missions and staff counselling. To date the total cost of consultancy fees for market testing has been £2·5 million.

Early Payment Initiative

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the reduction of outstanding debts as a result of his proposed initiatives for early payments.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information is not available. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced in the White Paper on competitiveness a number of measures to address late payment. We will continue to monitor changes in payment times after these measures have been implemented.

Exports

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* value of United Kingdom exports went to (i) the EC and (ii) non-EC countries in 1985, 1990 and the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: United Kingdom exports to the EC in 1985, 1990 and 1993 were £38 billion, £54 billion and £64 billion respectively, representing 49 per cent., 53 per cent. and 53 per cent. of United Kingdom exports. The value of exports to non-EC countries were £40 billion, £47 billion and £57 billion, representing 51 per cent., 47 per cent. and 47 per cent. of United Kingdom exports.

Defence Exports

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what applications for export licences to South America for defence equipment have *(a)* been granted, *(b)* received and *(c)* discussed over the past year; and what information regarding United Kingdom arms exports to Chile was given in the UN register.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 21 June 1994]:* Details of applications for export licences for goods on the military list of the Export of Goods (Control) Order to South American countries are as follows. It has not been possible to give separate figures for applications discussed, as it is not possible, without disproportionate effort, to distinguish between those applications where discussions took place and those where they did not.

Copies of the United Kingdom's returns for 1992 and 1993 to the UN register of conventional arms are in the Libraries of the House.

Export licence applications for military goods to South America
1 June 1993—31 May 1994

Country	Received	Issued
Argentina	16	3
Bolivia	7	7
Brazil	641	620
Chile	169	142
Columbia	20	12
Ecuador	19	15
Guyana	8	8
Paraguay	6	5
Peru	30	28
Uruguay	4	4
Venezuela	23	21

Unfair Consumer Contracts Directive

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what specific consultations he had with industry prior to the finalisation of the EC unfair consumer contracts directive about the content of that directive.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* We consulted extensively with industry, and with other interested parties, on the text of the draft directive as soon as it became available. The comments that we received were taken into account during the subsequent negotiations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the EC unfair consumer contracts directive applies to real property transactions; and whether the United Kingdom legislation required to implement the directive will distinguish between real and personal property.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* The Government's view is that the unfair contract terms directive does not apply to the sale of real property, though it would apply to any secondary transactions. It is not intended in the implementing regulations to distinguish between real and personal property.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has concerning the differences between the European Commission's understanding of the term "goods" in connection with the EC unfair consumer contracts directive and the definition of the term in United Kingdom law; how any discrepancy between the two understandings of the terms will be resolved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* I am not aware of any such differences. There is no general definition of what constitutes goods in United Kingdom law.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from trade associations in the financial services sector, the manufacturing sector, and the house-building sector concerning the EC unfair consumer contracts directive; and what plans he has to meet a group representing trade associations in those sectors to discuss the directive.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* My Department has received 87 responses to its consultation paper on the implementation of the unfair contract terms directive. These include a number from trade associations in the financial services, manufacturing and construction sectors. I have no current plans to meet any trade associations from those sectors, but a number of meetings have been held with my officials.

SCOTLAND

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leukosis.

Sir Hector Monro: Currently there are eight animals in Scotland under the age of 30 months which have reacted positively to tests for enzootic bovine leukosis.

Norwegian Salmon Imports

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations the Government have made to the European Commission to ensure that the minimum import price of Norwegian farmed salmon into the Community is reinstated.

Sir Hector Monro: None. Minimum import prices were introduced last autumn as an exceptional and temporary measure to counter low prices and expired on 17 May this year. Current data indicate that prices are well above the previous minimum import levels.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action is being taken to prevent Norwegian farmed Atlantic salmon being dumped on the United Kingdom market.

Sir Hector Monro: We are giving every assistance to the industry in its efforts to seek a more stable market. My right hon. Friend and I have had regular meetings with the industry to ensure full understanding of the situation and to discuss possible solutions, and have brought about the resumption of discussions between the Scottish and Norwegian fish farming representative organisations.

St. Anthony's Church, Johnstone

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will establish an ad hoc task force of relevant interests and expertise to provide St. Anthony's RC church, Hallhill road, Spateston, Johnstone, with advice on what sources of public funding may be available to assist repair to the church roof and to make the building wind and watertight; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: I am advised that Historic Scotland has already provided the hon. Member with advice, in a letter from the chief executive dated 14 April 1994, on possible sources of public funding to assist with the repair of St. Anthony's church.

Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce new building regulations or amend existing building regulations, to promote the development of barrier-free housing in terms of *(a)* new-build and *(b)* renovated or modernised properties; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend intends to consult on a range of building regulation requirements which could be applied to the design of new dwellings for the benefit of disabled people. We have no plans to apply any such new requirements retrospectively to existing dwellings.

Scottish Homes has announced that it expects recipients of grant funding to adopt a policy of promoting barrier-free standards wherever possible; and the draft housing community care circular issued for comment in February drew attention to the advantages of barrier-free housing.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to encourage public sector landlords to provide disabled people with personal housing plans; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is for local housing authorities and Scottish Homes to decide what housing information and advice to provide for applicants.

The draft housing and community care circular issued for comment in February emphasised that community care users, including those with physical disabilities, and their carers, should participate in individual community care assessments covering the range of housing, health and social care services suited to their needs.

Paisley Arts Centre in Education

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the amount of *(a)* capital and *(b)* recurring grants paid to the Paisley Arts Centre in Education, the youth theatre group based in Paisley, by the Scottish Arts Council in each year since 1988; what percentage of its outturn expenditure was covered by Scottish Arts Council grants in each year during the same period; what moneys PACE received from other sources in his Department during the same period; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he next plans to meet representatives of the Scottish Arts Council to discuss the youth theatre movement in Scotland; if he intends to raise the funding of the Paisley Arts centre in Education, the Paisley-based youth theatre group; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what changes in the criteria governing the allocation of grants by the Scottish Arts Council might have affected awards to the Paisley Arts centre in Education, the Paisley-based youth theatre group; whether he was consulted about any changes to these criteria; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will make a statement on the value and importance of the youth theatre movement in Scotland, with particular reference to the Paisley-based Paisley Arts centre in Education theatre group.

Sir Hector Monro: The relationship between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Scottish Arts Council is governed by the arm's-length principle. It is for the Scottish Arts Council to determine its artistic policy and strategy and to decide, in line with its artistic judgment, which individual arts bodies should benefit from the council's funds. Questions relating to the funding of arts organisations should be addressed to the council. My right hon. Friend attaches importance to the youth theatre movement in Scotland and will give support amounting to £62,920 in 1994-95 under section 23 of the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985 to the Scottish Youth Theatre, which is a national organisation operating on a Scotland-wide basis, the activities of which are broadly educational.

No Scottish Office grant has been paid to PACE. My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the Scottish Arts Council to discuss the youth theatre movement.

Rats

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of *(a)* the likely change in the population of rats in the sewerage system and *(b)* which factors will determine that change; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The regional and islands councils in Scotland are responsible for sewerage matters and no authority has indicated to my right hon. Friend that there has been any recent change in the population of rats in sewers. No significant problem with rats in sewerage systems in Scotland is known to exist. Any outbreak or an increase in the rat population in sewers would be dealt with by the authorities' drainage departments.

Local Authority Rents

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the average weekly rental charge and *(b)* the average increase in the weekly rental charge for (i) each district council in Scotland and (ii) Scottish Homes houses in each year since 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the tables:

Average Standard Local Authority Rents
£ per dwelling per week

Authorities	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Berwickshire	12·75	13·77	14·40	15·34	16·86	17·95	19·05	21·05	22·50	23·60	24·76
Ettrick and Lauderdale	13·22	13·14	13·14	13·88	14·59	15·55	16·48	18·83	20·23	21·09	22·77
Roxburgh	13·43	14·72	16·38	16·87	18·08	19·79	20·72	23·96	26·18	27·62	28·77
Tweeddale	11·28	11·34	12·69	13·14	14·27	14·07	15·50	17·83	19·56	22·44	23·25
Clackmannan	11·21	11·66	12·86	14·34	16·24	18·89	21·17	22·94	24·79	25·23	26·15
Falkirk	10·68	11·61	12·54	13·89	15·25	17·04	18·97	19·80	21·27	22·90	23·80
Stirling	9·29	11·55	13·62	15·07	16·09	18·46	20·67	23·19	25·30	29·14	29·26
Annandale and Eskdale	12·91	13·85	15·22	16·49	18·10	19·35	21·96	24·18	26·00	28·10	28·66
Nithsdale	10·50	11·48	13·13	13·86	15·45	16·96	18·75	21·14	23·21	25·66	25·72
Stewartry	13·96	14·09	15·45	16·45	18·06	19·51	20·75	24·53	26·89	28·40	28·39
Wigtown	14·17	15·79	16·69	16·70	17·57	18·42	18·90	23·48	27·07	29·34	29·77
Dunfermline	12·16	12·15	13·46	14·70	16·65	17·94	19·50	21·54	22·90	24·91	25·95
Kirkcaldy	11·60	12·60	13·85	15·32	17·02	18·67	20·62	22·38	24·48	26·22	26·69
North East Fife	12·69	13·82	15·87	17·07	18·16	20·79	21·09	23·34	23·52	24·50	25·00
Aberdeen	8·89	11·21	12·55	14·69	15·97	17·92	19·49	20·81	20·61	21·55	22·58

Authorities	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95
Banff and Buchan	12·43	13·80	14·98	15·61	17·27	18·97	20·01	21·17	22·09	23·17	23·65
Gordon	11·91	13·63	14·91	15·11	16·07	17·72	19·05	23·31	24·71	27·05	31·07
Kincardine and Deeside	11·80	13·01	13·85	14·34	15·03	15·07	17·12	18·96	21·62	25·63	27·87
Moray	11·64	13·58	14·03	15·66	17·25	19·41	20·77	20·78	22·28	24·40	25·81
Badenoch and Strathspey	12·56	13·50	15·35	15·32	16·91	16·78	15·93	18·87	22·13	26·80	28·49
Caithness	11·75	12·65	13·69	14·84	16·55	18·08	19·83	22·21	24·60	27·13	29·86
Inverness	11·28	13·19	14·02	15·96	17·91	20·26	21·59	24·36	27·06	29·09	30·19
Lochaber	12·28	12·98	14·29	16·03	17·14	19·09	21·17	23·68	26·50	29·83	32·10
Nairn	12·15	13·53	14·68	15·79	17·42	19·27	19·33	23·94	26·91	27·22	30·71
Ross and Cromarty	11·99	12·73	14·73	15·85	17·51	19·60	21·29	25·09	28·63	30·99	31·90
Skye and Lochalsh	13·02	14·91	16·88	17·12	18·05	19·19	21·41	25·01	29·72	31·77	32·44
Sutherland	11·83	12·80	14·17	14·43	15·79	17·25	19·68	22·93	27·47	30·09	32·46
East Lothian	11·10	12·39	13·36	14·71	16·28	17·88	19·98	22·11	22·63	22·99	23·58
Edinburgh	13·53	13·35	13·39	15·23	17·15	21·27	24·79	29·10	30·53	32·13	35·40
Midlothian	10·77	11·83	12·76	13·71	14·72	15·81	15·81	15·92	16·13	18·13	19·22
West Lothian	10·98	11·78	12·63	13·53	14·93	16·72	17·74	18·81	19·72	21·27	23·88
Argyll and Bute	13·29	15·32	15·31	15·80	17·36	19·10	21·46	23·38	26·27	29·36	31·95
Bearsden and Milngavie	11·45	12·17	14·23	16·58	17·97	19·71	21·83	24·44	27·66	28·60	28·45
Clydebank	10·04	12·19	15·04	17·06	19·00	22·75	25·55	27·12	26·60	28·06	29·07
Clydesdale	10·70	12·15	13·02	13·85	15·60	17·34	18·70	20·88	22·18	23·58	24·79
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	10·61	12·74	14·75	16·42	17·93	19·77	21·12	23·06	23·97	25·63	25·76
Cumnock and Doon Valley	10·39	11·11	12·15	13·61	14·67	16·34	17·70	20·30	22·56	24·35	25·31
Cunninghame	8·85	8·85	10·50	13·01	14·80	16·42	18·35	20·27	22·13	24·31	26·47
Dumbarton	9·38	9·38	11·68	14·60	18·07	21·15	24·00	25·77	27·97	29·90	32·18
East Kilbride	12·44	13·49	15·55	16·53	17·46	19·55	21·61	22·62	24·36	25·18	30·98
Eastwood	11·02	11·50	11·94	12·45	13·91	15·10	16·59	18·10	21·06	21·73	22·39
Glasgow	9·63	10·65	12·61	14·63	17·18	21·15	24·02	26·80	28·65	30·78	31·49
Hamilton	10·03	10·95	12·80	14·86	15·65	17·90	19·37	21·05	23·25	25·39	27·00
Inverclyde	9·08	11·30	12·40	13·33	14·37	16·85	19·17	21·44	29·93	25·94	26·94
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	9·59	10·59	12·42	13·85	14·48	16·22	17·51	19·39	19·46	20·83	21·42
Kyle and Carrick	10·42	12·18	13·37	14·38	15·65	16·57	18·74	20·22	21·22	26·28	28·18
Monklands	9·30	11·32	13·68	15·50	16·95	18·78	20·25	22·80	23·66	25·66	27·37
Motherwell	9·91	11·27	12·46	14·10	15·03	17·29	18·60	19·71	21·03	23·43	25·51
Renfrew	8·81	9·81	11·50	12·99	13·92	16·73	18·70	20·68	22·45	24·41	25·88
Strathkelvin	10·57	11·62	14·18	15·31	17·24	18·12	19·45	21·32	22·87	25·11	27·41
Angus	11·70	12·66	13·77	14·58	14·48	15·76	16·80	17·87	17·76	18·88	19·81
Dundee	8·80	9·82	11·63	13·61	17·11	21·19	25·25	28·20	30·44	32·06	32·71
Perth and Kinross	10·77	11·93	12·93	13·88	14·63	15·85	18·17	19·78	22·12	22·94	23·94
Orkney Islands	11·00	13·16	14·49	15·99	17·06	20·40	22·61	25·61	28·00	27·60	29·53
Shetland Islands	10·52	13·43	14·97	15·93	18·21	19·08	20·68	25·02	28·90	29·76	31·06
Western Isles	14·88	15·47	16·50	17·52	18·96	19·71	22·46	29·03	30·89	33·38	34·19
SCOTLAND	10·46	11·55	12·99	14·58	16·29	18·82	20·93	23·12	24·65	26·51	27·79
SCOTTISH SPECIAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION											
SCOTTISH HOMES											
Average Rental Income	13·06	14·23	15·79	17·28	19·02	20·88	23·81	26·73	29·14	31·76	33·83

Annual average rent increase

£ per dwelling per week

Authorities	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95
Berwickshire	1·20	1·02	0·63	0·95	1·52	1·10	1·09	2·01	1·44	1·11	1·15
Bittrick and Lauderdale	2·22	(0·08)	(0·00)	0·74	0·70	0·96	0·93	2·35	1·39	0·86	1·68
Roxburgh	1·02	1·28	1·67	0·48	1·22	1·71	0·93	3·23	2·22	1·44	1·15
Tweedale	(0·05)	0·06	1·35	0·44	1·13	(0·20)	1·43	2·33	1·73	2·88	0·81
Clackmannan	0·96	0·46	1·20	1·47	1·91	2·64	2·28	1·77	1·86	0·44	0·92
Falkirk	0·51	0·93	0·93	1·35	1·36	1·79	1·93	0·84	1·47	1·62	0·90
Stirling	0·01	2·26	2·08	1·44	1·03	2·37	2·21	2·52	2·11	3·84	0·12
Annandale and Eskdale	1·22	0·95	1·37	1·26	1·61	1·25	2·61	2·21	1·82	2·10	0·56
Nithsdale	0·90	0·98	1·66	0·72	1·59	1·52	1·79	2·39	2·06	2·46	0·06
Stewartry	1·31	0·13	1·36	1·00	1·61	1·45	1·24	3·77	2·36	1·51	(0·00)
Wigtown	2·19	1·62	0·90	0·01	0·87	0·85	0·48	4·57	3·60	2·26	0·43
Dunfermline	0·49	(0·00)	1·30	1·25	1·94	1·29	1·56	2·04	1·36	2·02	1·03
Kirkcaldy	1·15	0·99	1·25	1·47	1·69	1·65	1·95	1·76	2·10	1·74	0·47
North East Fife	(0·05)	1·14	2·05	1·20	1·09	2·63	0·29	2·26	0·18	0·98	0·50
Aberdeen	0·98	2·32	1·34	2·14	1·27	1·95	1·57	1·32	(0·20)	0·95	1·03
Banff and Buchan	1·17	1·37	1·18	0·63	1·66	1·70	1·04	1·16	0·92	1·08	0·48
Gordon	0·50	1·73	1·27	0·20	0·95	1·65	1·33	4·26	1·40	2·34	4·02
Kincardine and Deeside	1·28	1·21	0·84	0·49	0·70	0·03	2·05	1·84	2·66	4·01	2·24
Moray	1·29	1·94	0·45	1·63	1·59	2·16	1·35	0·01	1·50	2·12	1·41
Badenoch and Strathspey	1·04	0·94	1·85	(0·02)	1·59	(0·13)	(0·85)	2·94	3·26	4·67	1·69
Caithness	2·08	0·90	1·04	1·15	1·71	1·52	1·75	2·38	2·40	2·53	2·72
Inverness	0·74	1·91	0·83	1·94	1·95	2·35	1·33	2·77	2·70	2·03	1·10
Lochaber	0·92	0·70	1·31	1·74	1·11	1·95	2·08	2·52	2·82	3·33	2·27
Nairn	0·92	1·38	1·15	1·11	1·63	1·86	0·06	4·61	2·96	0·31	3·48

Authorities	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95
Ross and Cromarty	1·24	0·74	1·99	1·13	1·65	2·09	1·70	3·79	3·54	2·36	0·91
Skye and Lochalsh	1·94	1·89	1·97	0·24	0·93	1·14	2·21	3·60	4·71	2·04	0·68
Sutherland	1·06	0·97	1·37	0·26	1·37	1·46	2·43	3·25	4·53	2·62	2·37
East Lothian	0·86	1·29	0·97	1·35	1·57	1·60	2·11	2·13	0·52	0·36	0·59
Edinburgh	1·25	(0·18)	0·03	1·84	1·93	4·12	3·52	4·31	1·43	1·60	3·27
Midlothian	0·87	1·07	0·92	0·96	1·01	1·09	(0·00)	0·11	0·21	2·00	1·09
West Lothian	0·50	0·80	0·85	0·90	1·40	1·80	1·02	1·07	0·92	1·55	2·61
Argyll and Bute	(0·15)	2·03	(0·01)	0·49	1·56	1·74	2·35	1·92	2·88	3·09	2·60
Bearsden and Milngavie	0·58	0·72	2·06	2·35	1·40	1·74	2·12	2·61	3·23	0·94	(0·15)
Clydebank	1·00	2·15	2·85	2·02	1·94	3·75	2·81	1·56	(0·51)	1·46	1·01
Clydesdale	1·01	1·45	0·87	0·83	1·75	1·74	1·36	2·18	1·30	1·41	1·21
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0·49	2·13	2·01	1·67	1·50	1·85	1·35	1·94	0·91	1·66	0·13
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0·50	0·72	1·04	1·46	1·06	1·66	1·36	2·60	2·26	1·79	0·96
Cunninghame	0·01	0·00	1·65	2·51	1·78	1·63	1·93	1·92	1·85	2·18	2·17
Dumbarton	0·81	0·01	2·29	2·93	3·46	3·08	2·85	1·77	2·21	1·93	2·28
East Kilbride	1·01	1·05	2·06	0·98	0·93	2·09	2·06	1·01	1·74	0·82	5·80
Eastwood	0·50	0·48	0·44	0·50	1·46	1·19	1·49	1·51	2·96	0·67	0·66
Glasgow	0·01	1·02	1·96	2·02	2·55	3·98	2·86	2·78	1·85	2·13	0·71
Hamilton	0·70	0·92	1·85	2·06	0·79	2·25	1·47	1·68	2·20	2·15	1·61
Inverclyde	0·77	2·21	1·11	0·92	1·05	2·48	2·32	2·27	2·49	2·01	1·00
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0·51	1·01	1·83	1·43	0·63	1·74	1·29	1·88	0·07	1·38	0·58
Kyle and Carrick	0·81	1·76	1·19	1·01	1·27	0·91	2·17	1·49	1·00	5·06	1·90
Monklands	0·00	2·02	2·35	1·82	1·45	1·83	1·47	2·56	0·86	2·00	1·71
Motherwell	1·00	1·35	1·20	1·64	0·93	2·26	1·31	1·11	1·33	2·40	2·08
Renfrew	0·48	1·00	1·69	1·49	0·92	2·81	1·97	1·98	1·77	1·96	1·47
Strathkelvin	0·88	1·05	2·57	1·12	1·93	0·88	1·33	1·87	1·55	2·23	2·30
Angus	0·97	0·96	1·11	0·80	(0·10)	1·28	1·04	1·07	(0·11)	1·11	0·94
Dundee	0·73	1·02	1·81	1·98	3·50	4·08	4·06	2·96	2·23	1·62	0·65
Perth and Kinross	(0·00)	1·16	1·00	0·95	0·75	1·21	2·33	1·61	2·34	0·82	1·00
Orkney Islands	0·88	2·16	1·33	1·50	1·07	3·34	2·21	3·00	2·38	(0·40)	1·94
Shetland Islands	(0·05)	2·91	1·53	0·96	2·28	0·87	1·61	4·34	3·87	0·87	1·30
Western Isles	1·84	0·59	1·02	1·03	1·44	0·75	2·75	6·57	1·85	2·49	0·81
SCOTLAND	0·60	1·09	1·44	1·59	1·71	2·53	2·11	2·19	1·53	1·86	1·28
SCOTTISH SPECIAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION/ SCOTTISH HOMES											
Annual average rent increase	1·10	1·17	1·56	1·49	1·74	1·86	2·93	2·92	2·41	2·62	2·07

Note: Rent reductions in brackets.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by county the current estimate of the red squirrel population; and what were the figures *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Information on the red squirrel population is not available by county. The estimated total population of red squirrel in Scotland is 121,000 but there are no comparable figures for five and 10 years ago. The red squirrel is fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Scottish Natural Heritage is organising a conference of parties interested in squirrel management in Scotland in October of this year.

Strathclyde Police

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the costs of funding Strathclyde police will be apportioned to constituent local authorities in future years; what will be the basis of calculation of contribution from each authority; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The amalgamation scheme for the new Strathclyde joint police board following local government reorganisation will specify how the payment by the constituent authorities of the expenditure incurred by the board will be apportioned. My right hon. Friend will consult the authorities, before making the scheme, to seek their views on how costs should be apportioned, and will take full account of their preferences before making the amalgamation scheme.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the total value of revenue lost to local authorities by non-payment of non-domestic rates; if he will publish a table showing the value of unpaid non-domestic rates for each *(a)* regional and *(b)* district authority in cash terms for the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: In calculating the amounts which levying authorities have to contribute to the non-domestic rating pool, the Scottish Office Environment Department assumes that authorities will write off 1 per cent. of non-domestic rate income annually. Information about the level of actual non-payment in individual authority areas is not held centrally. However, local authorities do not lose any revenue as a result of non-payment of non-domestic rates as within each authority's overall level of aggregate external finance—which comprises non-domestic rate income, revenue support grant and specific grants—any shortfall of non-domestic rate income is made up with revenue support grant.

Quarries

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the specific powers and duties of *(a)* strategic planning authorities, *(b)* local planning authorities, *(c)* environmental health authorities, *(d)* Her Majesty's inspector of pollution and *(e)* other public bodies in relation to control of blasting and operational activities at quarries in Scotland; what plans he has to seek additional powers for any of these bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Planning authorities in Scotland—regional, islands and district councils—have powers under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 to grant planning permission in respect of, inter alia, quarrying proposals: in so doing, they may impose conditions restricting operational practices including, for example, times of blasting, suppression of noise, dust and so on.

Environmental health authorities in Scotland—islands and district councils—have general powers under part III of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and section 16 of the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897 to control noise nuisance. They also have powers under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to control dust and other emissions to the atmosphere.

Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate has no specific powers or duties in relation to blasting or other operational activities at quarries in Scotland. The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for making arrangements for the enforcement of health and safety legislation at quarries in Scotland. Its powers and duties are set out in the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and other relevant statutory provisions.

My right hon. Friend is satisfied that the powers available to these bodies are sufficient, and has no plans, at present, to seek to add to them.

Scottish Homes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the remit of the Homepoint group set up by Scottish Homes; and if he will make a statement on the progress of its work.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Homepoint is the result of action initiated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to invite Scottish Homes to evaluate the quality and availability of housing information and advice. The remit of Homepoint is to improve the quality and scope of such advice in Scotland, working through local authorities, voluntary providers and the private sector. I understand that Homepoint has just issued its third newsletter and that this describes progress made to date; copies can be obtained from Scottish Homes.

Councillors (Allowances)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take account of the proposal of the Secretary of State for the Environment on councillors' allowances; and if he will produce a consultative paper on increasing payments to councillors in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The Scottish Office Environment Department will shortly issue a consultation paper on possible changes to the new system of councillors' allowances introduced in April 1991. This will take account of the current Department of the Environment consultation exercise.

Public Sector Housing

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much subsidy was directed towards *(a)* council housing and *(b)* other public sector housing (i) in the latest year for which he has information and (ii) in 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* In 1979-80 direct subsidies to council housing through housing support grant and rate fund contributions amounted to £286·3 million, compared with £36·1 million in 1993-94. In 1979-80, subsidies to other Scottish public sector housing amounted to £64·9 million, compared with £21·3 million in 1993-94. The reduction reflects the Government's policy of moving away from indiscriminate general subsidies.

Assistance is now targeted on tenants in greatest need through the housing benefit system. Housing benefit payments made to Scottish public sector tenants in 1993-94 totalled nearly £600 million.

TRANSPORT

Driving Tests

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to privatise the Driving Standards Authority's driver and rider testing functions.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 27 May 1993 at columns *683-84* in which I announced that, following the review of the Driving Standards Agency's framework document, I had decided that these functions should continue to be conducted by an executive agency of the Department of Transport. The position will be reviewed in three to four years time.

Vessel Registration Requirements

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received up to May for the repeal of the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act 1919 requirement for British officers on British-registered vessels.

Mr. Norris: There have been 50 responses to the consultation document setting out these proposals.

Railway Property (Hunt Trespass)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to prevent cases of hunt trespass on railway lines; and if he will issue warnings to hunts for dangerous trespass;

(2) what plans he has to issue warnings to hunts involved in incidents of hunt trespass on railway lines.

Mr. Freeman: None. The prevention of hunt trespass on railway lines is a matter for Railtrack and the British Transport police. The BTP issues warnings in accordance with the Attorney-General's guidelines.

Traffic Forecasts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all past, current and proposed research commissioned or to be commissioned for or on behalf of the advisory panel on the review of the methodology of the traffic forecasts; and when he intends to publish this research.

Mr. Key: No research has been commissioned for, or on behalf of, the advisory group. The Department has in progress several pieces of research particularly relevant to traffic forecasting, listed in my answer to the earlier question of the hon. Member on 23 May at column *53*. The Department may consider letting more research on the advice of the group. No decision has yet been taken on the publication of this research.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations underlay his decision to include on the advisory panel for the review of traffic forecasts methodology representatives nominated by road lobby groups but not representatives nominated by environmental groups.

Mr. Key: The members of the advisory group were selected by the Department of Transport for the expertise that they could contribute to the forecasting process. As I said in my answer to an earlier question by the hon. Member on 23 May at column *53*, the members do not represent any interest or group.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the national road traffic forecasts will next be revised.

Mr. Key: The national road traffic forecasts are kept continuously under review, and will be revised if and when the need becomes apparent.

Efficiency Targets

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the reports due on 10 June produced by heads of departments for the 20 per cent. efficiency targets for each of the next two years.

Mr. MacGregor: No. These are internal management documents.

Disclosure of Information

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many cases the Data Protection Act 1984 was breached in the instance of the DVLA releasing information on the owners of vehicles to community charge collectors.

Mr. Key: DVLA is not aware of any instances in which the Data Protection Act has been breached as a result of releasing vehicle keeper details to local authorities.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last financial year the DVLA gave information on the owners of vehicles to community charge collectors in Scotland.

Mr. Key: In the last financial year, DVLA processed more than 5 million inquiries from the police and local authorities. Information on the number of inquiries by separate subject and local authority could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *108*, regarding departmental employees, if he will give the total cost of employing each grade of staff.

Mr. Norris: The table shows total salary costs for each grade and grade equivalent at April 1993 expressed as an annual figure. The salary costs comprise basic pay, allowances, superannuation and national insurance contributions.

Grade	*Total salary cost £*
Grade 1	108,598
Grade 2	320,797
Grade 3	1,652,525
Grade 4	1,018,554
Grade 5	5,901,718
Grade 6	7,013,177
Grade 7	27,275,123
SEO	29,127,629
HEO	31,144,504
EO	71,343,989
AO	55,932,859
AA	34,451,713
Traffic commissioners	374,136

Costs do not include 1993 pay settlements as these were not paid until after 1 April. They reflect all paid staff, including those working part time.

London City Airport

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions currently exist on flights to and from London City airport; and what is the current number of scheduled flights to and from London City airport.

Mr. Norris: The 1991 granting of planning permission for development at London City airport was subject to a number of conditions on the use of the airport. These include limits of 40 air transport movements per day at weekends, bank holidays and public holidays, 130 per day on other days and 36,500 air transport movements per calendar year. There are further restrictions which are expressed in terms of noise levels of aircraft.

In the 12 months to 31 March 1994, there were some 12,100 scheduled flights to and from London City airport. Currently on a typical weekday there are some 66 scheduled flights—Source: London City airport.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of the joint air miss working group reports on the air misses in the vicinity of Humberside airport on 23 May 1991 and 13 October 1992.

Mr. Norris: My officials have made arrangements with the Civil Aviation Authority, for copies of the documents mentioned, to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

The hon. Member may also wish to know that with immediate effect, further copies of the quarterly published, collated reports of the joint air miss working group will be placed in the Library.

Road Schemes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role and function of his Department's Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment.

Mr. Key: The Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport to advise him on any significant changes proposed in trunk road appraisal methods.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the reports his Department has commissioned from the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment in the last 10 years; what was the date of publication for each; and if he will place each of the reports in the Library.

Mr. Key: In the last 10 years the Department of Transport has commissioned three reports from the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, as well as asking for advice on various specific trunk road appraisal issues. Two reports have been published; "Urban Road Appraisal" dated June 1986, and "Assessing the Environmental Impact of Road Schemes" dated March 1992. A copy of each has been placed in the Library. The third, "Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic" which has recently been submitted to the Secretary of State, will be published when a response has been prepared. A copy of the report and Government response will be placed in the Library at that time.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what communications Her Majesty's Government have had with the European Commission regarding road schemes in the last five years.

Mr. Key: The Government have had many and various communications with the European Commission about road schemes during the last five years. A comprehensive analysis could not be undertaken without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual running cost of his Department's Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment; and from which subheads of which votes these funds are taken.

Mr. Key: The Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment running costs in financial year 1993-94 were £35,348·57; taken from the Highways, Safety and Traffic Administration subhead of class VI, vote 1, National roads, England.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the current members of his Department's Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment.

Mr. Key: The terms of appointment of the members of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment ended on submission of the report, "Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic" in May 1994. A new committee has yet to be appointed.

Membership of the most recent committee was:

Chairman

Mr. D. Wood QC, Principal of St Hugh's College Oxford

Vice-chairman

Mr. R. H. Stewart, Independent Planning Consultant

Members

Dr. D. Coombe, Director, The MVA Consultancy

Dr. P. Goodwin, Director of the Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford

Professor P. Hill, Director of the Transport Operations Research Group, University of Newcastle upon Tyne

Mr. D. Hutchinson, County Surveyor, Dorset County Council

Mr. P. Mackie, Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of Leeds

Miss A. M. Lees, Environmental Adviser. Formerly Controller of Transportation and Development, GLC

Mr. M. E. G. Taylor, Chairman of Eric R. Taylor (Services) Ltd.

Road Schemes (Batz)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what measures he has taken to ascertain whether increase in volumes of traffic resulting from the improvements to the A46 from Upper Swainswick to Tormarton, together with the Swainswick Batheaston bypass will cause pollution in the centre of Bath to exceed European Union limits;

(2) what are his Department's predictions for increases in numbers of vehicles per day, through Bath once the Upper Swainswick to Tormarton road scheme has been completed;

(3) what is the current cost benefit analysis of the Swainswick section of the Swainswick-Batheaston bypass.

Mr. Key: These questions are operational matters for the Highways Agency. The chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, is writing to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Don Foster, dated 22 June 1994:

Trunk roads around Bath
A4/A46 Batheaston/Swainswick bypass and
Upper Swainswick-Tormarton improvement

I am writing in response to your three recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Transport about trunk road schemes near Bath. These are matters for which the Highways Agency is now responsible. Perhaps I may take your three questions in turn.

Question 2648—What is the current cost benefit analysis of the Swainswick section of the Swainswick/Batheaston Bypass?

Answer—The benefit to cost ratio for the Batheaston/Swainswick Bypass is 1.32:1. However, there are no figures available for just the Swainswick section as the analyses undertaken were concerned with the whole of the scheme.

Question 2647—What are the predictions for increases in numbers of vehicles per day, through Bath, once the Upper Swainswick to Tormarton road scheme has been complete?

Answer—The trunk road improvements will improve access to Bath, but through north/south traffic must still cross Cleveland Bridge. The amount of traffic with a destination in Bath is unlikely to change but some redistribution on roads within Bath may occur. It will continue to be limited by the traffic restraint measures imposed by the Highway Authority and the number of parking spaces provided in the city. In the longer term we see the A36 East of Bath to Beckington scheme in combination with Batheaston and Swainswick bypasses helping through traffic to avoid Bath.

Question 2646—What measures have been taken to ascertain whether increase in volumes of traffic resulting from the improvements to the A46 from Upper Swainswick to Tormarton, together with the Swainswick/Batheaston bypass will cause pollution in the centre of Bath to exceed European Union limits?

Answer—A traffic study has indicated up to 600 vehicles per day may transfer from other routes within Bath to the London

Road West as indicated in Mr. Nutt's letter of 28 March 1994. This will have no measurable effect on pollution in the centre of Bath.

Construction work on the Batheaston-Swainswick bypass started in March this year. The work is programmed for completion in 1996. Development of the Swainswick-Tormarton improvement is at a comparatively early stage, and is subject to the satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the availability of funds.

Railways (Disabled Access)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers and duties he has to provide, or encourage the provision of, adequate access for disabled people to railway stations and rolling stock throughout the United Kingdom; what plans he has to seek new powers and/or duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I attach great importance to making provision for disabled people travelling on the railway. The Railways Act 1993 imposes a specific duty on the Rail Regulator to have particular regard to the interests of disabled people and requires him to draw up and encourage the adoption and implementation of a code of practice for protecting the interests of disabled users of rail passenger services and stations. As a condition of their licence, all operators of passenger services or stations are required to establish and comply with a statement of policy and detailed arrangements, procedures, services and other benefits to protect the interests of disabled people, taking account of the regulator's code of practice. The policy and arrangements have to be approved by the regulator.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet representatives of the privatised rail industry in Scotland to discuss the lack of access for disabled people to the premises and rolling stock at Gilmour Street station in Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to meet representatives of the railway industry in Scotland to discuss this specific issue. Much of our present railway infrastructure was constructed at a time when less attention was paid to the needs of disabled people. The existence of a code of practice, to be published shortly by the Rail Regulator, will mean that when new facilities are being designed, or old facilities refurbished, there will be a statutory code to which the designers can look to ensure that disabled passengers' needs are not forgotten. A sensible input at an early stage in the design can make all the difference and be of benefit to all passengers.

Harbours (Waste Disposal)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what means the Government will introduce to encourage port and harbour authorities to evaluate and set an integrated port fee which includes an appropriate charge for the disposal of waste such as oily waste, garbage and unwanted chemicals.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce integrated harbour fees incorporating fees for handling oily wastes in order to encourage ships to use port waste-handling facilities.

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency is currently undertaking a comprehensive survey of the current provision of reception facilities in United Kingdom ports. Analysis of the survey results will indicate the extent to which charges for the use of reception facilities are integrated into harbour fees. Based on this information, the Government will decide what further action, if any, needs to be taken.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the United Kingdom Government will seek through the International Maritime Organisation a requirement that when garbage is discharged from a ship at shore an entry is placed in the ship's log and that such entries are subject to checking.

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom is taking an active role at IMO in the development of shipboard waste management plans and record keeping procedures for the discharge of garbage. Record books for the disposal of garbage will, when they are introduced, be subject to checks by port state control inspectors to ensure that the regulations are being complied with.

Great Yarmouth Harbour

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has examined the need for an outer harbour at Great Yarmouth; and what plans he has to secure EU funding for such a harbour.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 21 June 1994]:* Last year, as part of the study by the European Commission of trans-European transport networks, my Department invited ports to submit proposals for projects which fulfilled certain criteria designed to identify projects of Community interest. The Great Yarmouth port authority put forward a proposal for an outer harbour which appeared to meet the criteria. My Department therefore forwarded this proposal to the Commission, along with more than 100 other port projects, but without prejudice to any European or United Kingdom approvals which might be required, whether for statutory, planning or financial purposes.

Although the Commission initially identified the Great Yarmouth proposal, with many other port projects, as potentially of common interest, the Commission's present position on financial support for ports projects generally, or for individual projects, is not resolved. Nor have I yet decided whether to support the project for EU funding.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the likely impact of rural post office closures on total car use in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No such assessment has been made.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 June 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice and instructions have been issued from his Department concerning the granting of legal aid to those pursuing claims concerning Creutzfeldt Jakob disease.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Civil Enforcement Agents

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report,* column 335, when he expects to be able to publish his analysis of the responses received to the consultation paper on the organisation and management of civil enforcement agents.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The consultation exercise raised a wide range of difficult issues. The Lord Chancellor is continuing to give consideration to these, and is not in a position to say when an announcement will be made.

DEFENCE

D-day Commemoration

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 May, *Official Report,* column *127,* what arrangements were made for the funding of the national commemoration of the 50th anniversary of D-day.

Mr. Hanley: The expected additional cost to the MOD of the commemoration of D-day is between £3,000,000 and £4,000,000. This covers expenditure on the military events organised by the MOD. Parliamentary approval to this expenditure is being sought in the 1994-95 supply estimates for defence: operational and support costs vote, class I, vote 1. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure of £1,000,000 on new services is being covered by a repayable advance from the contingencies fund.

Troop Location

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future location of units returning from Germany and Hong Kong; and if he will now announce the location for the second additional infantry battalion announced on 3 February 1993, *Official Report,* column *321.*

Mr. Hanley: A number of options have been considered for permanent barracks required for three Army units returning from Germany in 1995, for one of the battalions returning from Hong Kong, and for the Gurkhas. I am pleased to announce that I have decided that the following locations will be retained by the Army as permanent baracks:

i. The Gurkhas, currently in Church Crookham near Aldershot, will move to Elizabeth Barracks, Pirbright around the end of the year. Until that time Pirbright will house the Black Watch, returning in July from Hong Kong.

ii. The Army Apprentice College, Chepstow will be converted into a permanent infantry barracks and will be the home for the 1st Battalion the Royal Welch Fusiliers from December 1995.

iii. 14 Signals Regiment, returning from Germany, will be housed permanently in RAF Brawdy from December 1995. Until then, RAF Brawdy will be used as temporary accommodation for the 1st Battalion the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

iv. 16 Regiment Royal Artillery (Air Defence), returning from Germany, is to be located at the Royal Artillery Barracks, Woolwich by November 1995. Woolwich is the historic home of the Royal Artillery.

v. 39 Regiment Royal Artillery, returning from Germany, is to be located at Albermarle Barracks, Ouston from November 1995.

I am still considering possible locations for another permanent infantry barracks to cater for the second of the two additional infantry battalions announced on 3 February 1993, *Official Report,* column *320.* I hope to be able to make a further announcement very soon.

Britannia

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement about the future of Her Majesty's yacht Britannia.

Mr. Rifkind: HM yacht Britannia was launched in 1953 and commissioned for service in January, 1954. In the 40 years since then she has travelled over 1 million miles and has served as royal residence and a setting for official entertainment by the Queen and members of the royal family during state and other visits overseas and in home waters, and has also been used for the promotion of British commercial interests overseas. She was originally designed to have the additional function of serving as a hospital ship in time of war, but has never served in this capacity and it is no longer practicable for her to do so. Her outstanding contribution over the years reflects the great care and professionalism which the Royal Navy, and in particular her successive ship's companies, have devoted to her.

The yacht last underwent a major refit in 1987. A further refit at an estimated cost of some £17 million would be necessary in 1996-97 but would only prolong her life for a further five years. In view of her age, even after the refit she would be difficult to maintain and expensive to run. It has therefore been decided to decommission Britannia in 1997.

The Government will now consider the question of whether to replace Britannia. The Queen has made it known that in the light of changes in the pattern of royal visits since the yacht was built, she does not consider a royal yacht to be necessary in future solely for the purposes of royal travel. None the less, in view of the success of Britannia in her representational role during state visits, and on other state occasions, and of the part played by the royal yacht in trade promotion, the Government believe it right to consider, without commitment, whether there should be a replacement at some future point, together with other options for meeting the tasks presently fulfilled by Britannia.

The Government will be seeking Her Majesty's views on what should happen to Britannia after 1997. We shall

seek to find a way of enabling her to continue to serve a useful purpose, even though she will no longer go to sea. A further statement will be made in due course.

Territorial Army (Germany)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any decision has been taken on the future of the continental Territorial Army in Germany.

Mr. Hanley: The continental Territorial Army, CTA, which is some 160-strong, was formed in Germany in 1984. At that time, when there was still a real threat from the Warsaw pact and Soviet Union, there was seen to be clear advantage in recruiting reserve forces from among those with useful skills who could be immediately available on mobilisation in the area they are likely to serve. The requirement for Territorial Army units based in Germany has now been reviewed following the changes in the security environment that have resulted from the end of the cold war. It has been decided that there is no longer a need to base TA units in Germany and the CTA will be disbanded with effect from 30 November 1994. Any individual who wishes to continue to serve will be given the opportunity to do so in a United Kingdom-based unit. I should like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to all the volunteers who have served with the CTA since its formation.

Maintenance Group Defence Agency

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key management targets of the Maintenance Group Defence Agency for the financial year 1994-95.

Mr. Hanley: The Maintenance Group Defence Agency's key management targets for 1994-95 concentrate on three principal objectives:

(a) The effective performance of the Group;
(b) The economic use of resources;
(c) The introduction of management initiatives.

The group's targets are:

(1) To achieve at least 98 per cent. of the specified aerosystems maintenance task to standard and on time;
(2) To achieve the Joint Service Publication of 336 Defence Supply Manual speed-of-issue and pipeline targets for at least 95 per cent. of the Depot Supply task;
(3) To keep within the Group's allocated budget;
(4) To reduce the cost per unit of output by 2·5 per cent.;
(5) To complete the implementation of the Warehouse and Transport Management System by 31 March 1995.

Navy Training and Recruitment

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about possible defence agency status for the Royal Navy's training and recruiting organisation.

Mr. Hanley: I have decided that the Royal Navy's flag officer training and recruiting organisation, FOTR, should be considered as a candidate for defence agency status under the next steps initiative. FOTR currently employs 5,400 staff and has some 15 major training schools across the country. Of those 3,900 are service personnel who rotate between front-line operational appointments and the FOTR organisation, thus providing current knowledge, experience and expertise; the remaining 1,500 are civilians.

A "prior options" study of FOTR's organisation is being undertaken.

Comments and contributions from those with an interest in the organisation would be welcome and should be sent, by 8 August, to:

Head of Naval Personnel Finance & Systems
2SL/CNH
Victory Building
HM Naval Base
Portsmouth PO1 3LS

VIP and Communications Flying

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of RAF VIP and communications flying.

Mr. Rifkind: Following the efficiency scrutiny undertaken last year, it has been decided that the Queen's flight, currently based at RAF Benson, will move to RAF Northolt to join the other RAF communications aircraft of No. 32 Squadron. Rationalisation into a single collocated unit, which will be known as 32 (The Royal) Squadron, will enable the RAF to continue to provide a flexible and cost-effective service to the royal family and the other VIP customers. The high standards associated with the Queen's Flight will be fully maintained. The new arrangements will include a new centralised tasking and monitoring organisation to ensure best use of all the assets available.

The bulk of the use made by the royal family of the Queen's flight is for national, ceremonial and other public duties where the cost falls to the MOD. Private use of the Queen's flight at MOD expense has been restricted to the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Queen Mother, and the Prince and Princess of Wales. Such use has been minimal. However, Her Majesty has indicated a wish in future that the MOD should be reimbursed for this use, and arrangements are being made accordingly.

Long-range VIP flying will for the time being continue to be undertaken by the RAF's VC10 fleet. However, the possibility of using an RAF Tristar remains under consideration.

Otterburn Training Area

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make details available of proposals for the development of the Otterburn training area.

Mr. Hanley: New developments within the Otterburn training area are required for training with AS 90 and MLRS—multiple-launch rocket system—equipments on their return from Germany under the Government's "Options for Change" programme.

Last year independent environmental consultants, RPS Clouston Ltd., were commissioned to consider proposals by my Department for Otterburn. Using their material, and advice provided informally by the Northumberland National Park Authority, the proposals have undergone a detailed scrutiny within my Department and have been significantly refined. I am now satisfied that these revised proposals are for the minimum development necessary to meet the Army's operational training requirements.

These development proposals are, of course, subject to planning approval, and as a first step in the public consultation process my Department will shortly be making arrangements for consultants to undertake a comprehensive environmental impact assessment. When

this assessment has been completed and after careful consideration of any views put forward by the statutory bodies and other relevant parties, it is out intention to lodge a notice of proposed development with the Northumberland National Park Authority.

Because there are sensitive issues involved my Department will enter into an early dialogue with the Northumberland national park and Countryside Commission authorities to examine the issues in detail and recommend how a balance might be achieved between the requirements of national park policies and the Army's need for effective training.

Aircraft Collisions

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal actions were taken against his Department following the collisions between civil and military aircraft over Norfolk on *(a)* 9 August 1974 and *(b)* 29 February 1984; and what were the outcomes of the actions.

Mr. Hanley: My Department no longer holds records which might relate to the legal and claims aspects of either of these accidents.

Hawk Jets

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to monitor the use by Indonesia of British Hawk jets.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom could not monitor the use of these aircraft on a regular basis. But the Government have made clear their concerns and have received an assurance from the Indonesian Government that the Hawks will not be used against civilians. Staff from the British embassy in Indonesia regularly visit East Timor, as do representatives of various human rights organisations. We have no reports from these visitors of Hawk sightings there, either in the air or on the ground.

Flight Recorders

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider his Department's policy on fitting flight recorders to military aircraft.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's policy on fitting recorders to military aircraft remains that all new aircraft types shall be fitted with accident data recorders. The technical difficulties and costs in fitting ADRs to older aircraft types are such that this could be undertaken only as part of a major upgrade programme.

Mr. Paul Martin

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds Mr. Paul Martin was suspended from work; when he hopes to announce the results of his Department's inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: Mr. Paul Martin was suspended from work, under departmental disciplinary regulations, pending the outcome of inquiries into the security implications of allegations of improper behaviour reported by a national newspaper. It is not the practice to announce the results of internal inquiries of this nature and I do not, therefore, intend to make a statement.

Tornado

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the RAF Tornado GR1/1A fleet will be equipped with thermal imaging airborne laser designator equipment; and what is the expected resultant increase in the requirement for night flying training by RAF Tornado aircraft.

Mr. Hanley: It is not our practice to release operational information such as that concerning the number of TIALD-equipped aircraft. There are no plans to increase night flying training in order to practice TIALD operations at night, since it should be possible to practice these within the current Tornado GR1 night flying training programme.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual requirement for live delivery of the JP233 weapon in the continuation training syllabus of combat-ready Tornado GR1 aircrew; and where the live firing is carried out.

Mr. Hanley: There is no annual requirement for live delivery of the JP233 weapon in the continuation training syllabus of combat-ready Tornado GR1 aircrew. Live firing is not carried out during training.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many confidential incident reporting system —CONDOR—reports have been received in each year since 1979 in which military pilots have reported narrowly avoiding hitting the ground.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 15 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *749.*

Rapier Missile Launcher

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the operational function of the ground-to-air Rapier missile launcher that was stationed in the village of Great Stukely, Cambridgeshire, on 16 May; whether the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was informed of its presence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Rapier missile launcher was stationed in Great Stukely, Cambridgeshire, on 16 May 1994 as part of a routine airfield defence training exercise. The office of the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon, was consulted prior to the deployment.

TREASURY

Football Clubs (Taxation)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many Football Association Premier League clubs are under examination by the special compliance office of the Inland Revenue; if he will identify the clubs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much was recovered by the Inland Revenue from FA Premier League clubs following investigations in each of the last three financial years; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what efforts are being made to recover unpaid taxes from FA Premier League clubs.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue's special compliance office is conducting investigations into FA Premier League clubs. For reasons of confidentiality, to which football clubs are entitled as much as any other taxpayer, I am not able to provide details of these investigations or of any results which may have arisen from them.

Special Compliance Office

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was received by the Inland Revenue following investigations by the special compliance office in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Dorrell: Special compliance office investigations produced the following yield in the last three financial years:

	£ million
1991-92	330·6
1992-93	387·4
1993-94	348·3

European Union (United Kingdom Contribution)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Union in *(a)* the calendar year 1995 and *(b)* the current year; and what was the actual net contribution in 1993.

Sir John Cope: The Government's estimates of the United Kingdom's net contribution to EC institutions for the calendar years 1993 and to 1994 are set out in the "Statement on the 1994 Community Budget" (Cm 2486), which was published in March this year. Our estimates for the calendar year 1995 will be published in next year's statement.

Alcohol (Illegal Imports)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many seizures of illegally imported alcohol were made by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise service in the last year for which figures are available; what was the total volume of these seizures; and how these figures compare with previous years.

Sir John Cope: During the year to 31 March 1994 Customs and Excise seized 790,169 litres of alcoholic drink in 1,866 seizures. Before the completion of the single market on 1 January 1993 only seizures of spirits were separately recorded as numbers of seizures of other alcoholic drinks were insignificant. Seizures recorded in the previous two financial years were: 1992-93, including first three months of the single market, 88,858 litres in 1,561 seizures; 1991-92, 73,956 litres in 3,132 seizures.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Contracting Out

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which local authorities have approached his Department for their views on the contracting-out of trading standards and/or environmental health enforcement; what proposals were made by those authorities; and what position his Department took on such proposals.

Mr. McLoughlin: There have been no such approaches.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and for the Department of Energy when it was a separate department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: My Department does not record centrally details of work undertaken in terms of its activity, and collection of this information would incur disproportionate costs.

Unfair Consumer Contracts Directive

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether full compliance costs assessments have yet been undertaken in connection with the implementation of the European Commission's unfair consumer contracts directive; what are the results of such assessments to date; what benefits this legislation will bring to United Kingdom industry; and how it furthers the Government's deregulation initiative.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* A compliance cost assessment is in the course of preparation following responses to my Department's consultation paper published last October. To the extent that it may call for improved standards in the drafting of consumer contracts the unfair contract terms directive should assist the competitiveness of United Kingdom industry. Political agreement on the directive was reached before the launch of the Government's deregulation initiative, but consistent with that initiative the Government secured the deletion of certain provisions which appeared likely to prove onerous to industry.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes were *(a)* sought and *(b)* obtained to the early drafts of the EC unfair consumer contracts directive; and to what extent he now considers that the directive is helpful to United Kingdom industry.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* The text of the unfair contract terms directive at the time of its adoption by the Council of Ministers broadly met the United Kingdom's negotiating objectives. In particular, we secured the deletion of potentially onerous provisions regarding the law relating to sale of goods, and agreement that the annex of potentially unfair terms should not be a blacklist. To the extent that it may call for improved standards in the drafting of consumer contracts the directive should assist the competitiveness of United Kingdom industry.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Pensions

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make further improvements to the war pensions scheme.

Mr. Hague: We have decided to introduce two improvements which will benefit two groups of war widows. First, from October, we will supplement to United Kingdom levels the pensions of New Zealand war widows resident in this country, who are British. They receive the lower New Zealand pension because their husbands served with the independent New Zealand forces, not with those of the United Kingdom.

Secondly, and also from October, we will improve the financial position of some Northern Ireland war widows. They are the widows of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment who died in service between 1 April 1974 and 31 March 1980 and whose attributable pension from the Ministry of Defence is not as much as the special payments made to pre-1973 war widows. We will top up the MOD pension to the level of the pre-1973 payment.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his further letter of 12 April to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's letter, reference POF(6) 3644/65, concerning a constituent.

Mr. Burt: I replied to the hon. Member today, and I am sorry for the delay.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Daylight Saving

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *598*, what plans he has for the adoption of daylight saving.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Our policy on future summer time arrangements, including whether to move to central European time, remains under consideration.

British National Party

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will refer the case of J. R. Edmonds of the BNP to the Court of Appeal in order that that court may impose a higher sentence in that case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has no powers to do so. Sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act give the Attorney-General the power to refer unduly lenient sentences passed for certain offences in the Crown court to the Court of Appeal. The power applies to offences that are triable only in the Crown court and to those triable either way which have been prescribed by order made by the Secretary of State. The Home Secretary has made such an order in respect of offences of indecent assault, making threats to kill and child cruelty.

I understand that Mr. Edmonds was convicted of violent disorder. This offence does not fall within the scope of the Attorney-General's powers.

Police Negotiating Board

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the draft regulations which have been agreed at the police negotiating board and remain to be placed before the House and in each case the date when they were agreed at the PNB and the expected date when they will be placed before the House.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None, but I will write to the hon. Member.

Primates

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in establishing an EU register of primates held in breeding and research establishments.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The idea of a primate register has not so far been taken up by our EU partners. I understand, however, that a European primate resources network, EUPREN, is in the process of being established by primate breeding and research centres in a number of member states, with the object of improving both the quality of primate research and the welfare of the animals concerned. I gather that the network will be an appropriate forum for the exhange of information on the availability of suitable animals.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the next survey of primates held in British laboratories is scheduled to take place;

(2) what percentage of primates held in United Kingdom laboratories are captive bred.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A survey in 1992 showed that approximately 80 per cent. of old world primates held in the United Kingdom laboratories were captive bred. In 1993 almost all old world primates imported for use in scientific procedures were captive bred. Most new world primates held here have been bred in United Kingdom.

No decision has yet been taken on the need for another survey.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which species of primate are covered by the term "larger primate", as referred to in the 1992 annual report of the Animal Procedures Committee.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The term referred to old world primates, in particular macaques and baboons.

Animal Experiments

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken by him to expedite the validation of the fixed dose method as a replacement for the LD50 test.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Holders of project licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 are required to use the fixed dose procedure wherever this is acceptable to the relevant regulatory authority. In other cases licensees are encouraged to seek the agreement of the regulatory

authority to use the FDP rather than the LD50 test. We are considering a recommendation from the Animal Procedures Committee that action be taken to encourage acceptance of data from tests conducted to current OECD guideline methods; these include the FDP.

Channel Islands

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints over the past five years have been received by his Department relating to the miscarriage of justice, defects in the legal system or failure to deal with crime promptly from *(a)* the Channel Islands and *(b)* Jersey.

Mr. Maclean: Letters are received each year from a few individuals in the Channel Islands or in the United Kingdom who are dissatisfied with some aspect of the criminal law or judicial system in the island in question or a court's decision in a particular case. No central record is kept of such letters, but the number of complainants is very small.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently being held in detention in police stations; what is the length of time of their detention in police stations and in total; and if he will present this information according to the nationality of the asylum seekers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information now available, following the introduction of improved recording systems, shows that on 15 June 10 people who had at some stage claimed asylum were recorded centrally as detained in police stations under Immigration Act powers. The breakdown by nationality and total length of detention—all in police stations—was as follows:

	Detained
2 Turkish	5 days
1 Turkish	4 days
1 Algerian	3 days
1 Algerian	2 days
1 Indian	2 days
1 Turkish	1 day
1 Brazilian	1 day
1 Russian	detained on 15 June
1 Algerian	detained on 15 June

Non-payment of Debt

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were found guilty of non-criminal offences related to the non-payment of community charge or council tax and imprisoned for each period of six months since April 1990; what was the length of their sentences; and what was the average amount of the debt unpaid for the non-payment of which they had been found guilty.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is given in the table. No information is available centrally regarding the amount of debt unpaid.

Receptions into prison service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of community charge, April 1990 to March 1994

Six month period	*Number received*	*Average sentence length (days)*
April 1990 to September 1990	1	30
October 1990 to March 1991	9	29
April 1991 to September 1991	50	27
October 1991 to March 1992	119	27
April 1992 to September 1992	270	31
October 1992 to March 1993[1]	434	30
April 1993 to September 1993[1]	582	31
October 1993 to March 1994[1]	620	32

[1] Provisional figures.

Police Car Sirens

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the instructions issued to officers of the Metropolitan police regarding the use of police car sirens.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand from the Commissioner that guidance on the use of sirens is presently under review and that specific instructions are expected to be issued shortly. I shall place a copy of these in the Library when they are available.

Doncaster Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the performance targets for *(a)* the number of assaults on staff and *(b)* the number of assaults on prisoners set out in the contract to run Doncaster prison; and what the penalty will be if these targets are exceeded.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 23 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the performance targets for the number of assaults on staff and prisoners at Doncaster prison.

The contract does not include targets for the number of assaults. There are, however, the following performance measures:

Assaults on staff—no more than 77 in the first year of operation.

Assaults on prisoners—no more than 148 in the first year of operation.

It is the intention of the Prison Service to reduce the figures after a review of performance at the end of the first year.

If these figures are exceeded, the contractor will have failed to deliver the contracted service and a financial remedy will be imposed against the contract.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Rough Sleepers and Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Lord President of the Council what instructions are given to security staff in his departmental offices in London for dealing with *(a)* those sleeping rough in departmental doorways and *(b)* beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems have been experienced with each group in the last three months.

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office is housed within buildings for which the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, respectively, have overall security responsibility. I accordingly refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the similar questions he addressed to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Disabled People

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the number and percentage of registered disabled persons employed by the House of Commons; and what would be the number and proportion equivalent to the statutory quota.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply, on behalf of the House of Commons Commission.

Of a total of 1,404 staff employed by the House of Commons Commission 16 are registered disabled persons; this represents 1·1 per cent. of the work force. The statutory quota, 3 per cent., for the current complement would be 42.

Upper Waiting Hall (Exhibitions)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee, pursuant to his answer of 3 May, *Official Report*, column *404*, regarding applications for exhibitions of a parliamentary nature in the Upper Waiting Hall, on what criteria the Committee decides to exempt applications from ballot.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: In order to be considered for exemption from the ballot for exhibitions to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall a proposed exhibition must have a clear and direct connection with Parliament.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 June.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. This afternoon, I shall be travelling to Corfu for the European Council.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments do not send out a ministerial reply to letters from hon. Members.

The Prime Minister: It is for Ministers in each Department to decide the best way in which to reply to correspondence from hon. Members. Where the correspondence covers operational matters dealt with by an executive agency, the Minister may decide that it would be more appropriate and helpful for a reply to be sent by the agency chief executive, who has the detailed knowledge which the hon. Member is seeking, as well as the necessary delegated authority to take appropriate action. It is open to an hon. Member who is dissatisfied with a reply from an agency chief executive to raise the matter with the responsible Minister.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what alterations he will make in future financial years to lessen the effect of the south-east area cost adjustment on the comparative position of the south-west of England.

Mr. Curry: The area cost adjustment will be discussed with the local authority associations during the summer. The Government will be giving particular attention to the way that the adjustment tapers within the south-east region outside London. We will also give careful consideration to any new evidence which is brought forward on other aspects of the adjustment. We will announce our proposals for the 1995-96 local government finance settlement later in the year.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the criteria used to assess the suitability of data sources for use in standard spending assessment calculations.

Mr. Curry: The data sources used in the calculation of standard spending assessments are generally those which are compiled on a consistent basis across all relevant authorities, are judged to be reliable, are not affected by individual authorities' own decisions, and are as up to date as possible.

There is a continuing dialogue with the local authority associations about data sources which are capable of producing indicators relevant to, or indicative of, the variations in the need for local authority spending.

Farm Shops

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 26 May, *Official Report*, columns *240-41*, if he will make a statement about the Government's planning policy towards applications for farm shops in the green belt.

Mr. Baldry: Advice on development control matters within green belts is contained in planning policy guidance note 2. Paragraph 13 of that document states that approval should not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings or for the change of use of existing buildings for purposes other than uses appropriate to a rural area.

It is for local planning authorities to take this advice into account, together with all other material planning considerations, including my answer of 26 May, *Official Report*, column *240*, in making planning decisions concerning farm shops in green belts.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave in the *Official Report* on 26 April 1993, column *318*, for a reference to those circumstances where a planning application for a farm shop may not be necessary.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from non-governmental organisations this year on environmental risks of *(a)* nuclear facility decommissioning and *(b)* the storage and processing of high-level radioactive waste.

Mr. Atkins: The Department received a copy of a report. "Consequence Analysis of a Catastrophic Failure of Highly Active Waste Tanks Serving THORP and Magnox Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Plants at Sellafield", by Mr. Peter Taylor. The report was passed to the Health and Safety Executive, which regulates radioactive waste storage arrangements at nuclear licensed sites.

Cement Kilns

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assurances he proposes to provide to constituents in Rutland, Stamford, Ribble Valley and elsewhere about the protection of the environment during the burning of substitute fuel in cement kilns.

Mr. Atkins: Current authorisations of cement kilns provide for certain substitute fuels to be used in trial burning subject to the agreement of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. While each case will be considered on its merits, HMIP, using experience gained, will be requiring trials to be conducted on the following basis. No more such trials will be approved than are necessary to allow HMIP to determine what constitutes best available techniques not entailing excessive costs—BATNEEC—for operations by the cement manufacturing industry in these circumstances.

Before a trial commences, satisfactory baseline data on the normal operation of the cement manufacture will need to be provided to HMIP. These data will have to cover all of the aspects in the following paragraphs, in partiular including full details of the kiln and its operating characteristics, and of the emissions to the environment during normal operation.

Trials will be run in accordance with a schedule of conditions to be agreed in advance with HMIP. This schedule will be placed on the public register. Operators will be required to make on-going reports on the progress of all trials and in particular to clear with HMIP any reasons for slippage in the progress of any trial. HMIP's agreement will be needed to any proposals to use substitute fuels for longer periods than agreed in the trial schedule. Operators will be expected to discontinue any trial in the event of developments which might adversely affect the environment. For monitoring purposes, HMIP will impose an enhanced and stricter regime to meet the particular circumstances of the trials.

Only substitute fuel that can meet a suitable specification, agreed in advance with HMIP and covering, for example, chlorine, polychlorinated biphenyls, sulphur and heavy metals content, will be allowed to be used in the trials. All deliveries of the substitute fuel will be required to meet the agreed specification. Storage to an agreed standard and with adequate control systems will be needed for the substitute fuel. This may call, for example, for tank level indicators, suitable bunding of containment, instrumentation for controlling and measuring the flow of the substitute fuel, appropriate emergency cut-outs and other features.

HMIP will insist on being satisfied in advance of relevant aspects of the trial operations. Details of kiln operating characteristics covering, for example, temperatures in the kiln, percentage recycled electrostatic precipitator dust, oxygen concentration, fuel rate, trip history and feed rate, will need to be supplied to HMIP. Information on the EP make, number of zones, electrical details for each bank, temperature and carbon monoxide concentration will also be required.

The trials will be principally concerned with the testing and monitoring of releases. Continuous monitors for particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and oxygen, calibrated to the satisfaction of HMIP, will have to be installed before trials commence. Where emissions, for example, of hydrogen chloride, hydrogen fluoride and total organic carbon are concerned, it may be necessary for operators to hire or import continuous monitors or to use recognised test methods, all in agreement with HMIP. Other testing as specified by HMIP will be needed on the kiln feed, EP dusts, and clinker. The operator will be expected to undertake adequate local area monitoring. Operators will be required to make on-going returns of trial monitoring data to HMIP which, in accordance, with the requirements of the legislation, will enter them on the public register. HMIP will carry out independent testing to verify the results of the trials.

On completion of the agreed trials schedule, operators will be required to revert to routine manufacture not using substitute fuel. If, following completion of the trials, an operator wishes to use substitute fuels on a permanent basis he will have to apply for a variation of the existing authorisation. In this circumstance, the operator will have to provide HMIP with an assessment of the outcome of the trials to justify his proposals. If the proposed variation amounts to a "substantial change" to the process, the application will have to be advertised and be subject to consultation with statutory consultees and the public. The outcome of individual applications cannot be anticipated, but policy in principle will be to require appropriate improvements to the plant, in order to guard against adverse effects on the environment from the burning of substitute fuel.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yemen

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the United Kingdom ambassador to the Yemen made in his meeting with the chairman of the Presidential Council in Sanaa.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In his meeting with President Saleh on 8 June, the British ambassador urged the President to comply with the terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 924; in particular to agree to an immediate cease fire to allow dialogue to take place.

Western Sahara

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress being made in the United Nations voter identification programme for the referendum in the Western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations identification commission announced on 1 June that it had completed the preliminary analysis of applications for registration received so far, and was launching the identification and registration process both in Western Sahara and in the refugee camps in the Tindouf area.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what safeguards are being put in place by the United Nations to prevent Moroccan citizens from wrongly taking part in the Western Sahara referendum.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Only those individuals identified and registered by the United Nations identification commission will be eligible to vote in the referendum. One of the duties of MINURSO will be to ensure the proper conduct of the referendum.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what stipulations have been made by the United Nations about residence and other qualifications to take part in the Western Sahara referendum.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Security Council resolution 907 of 29 March 1994 endorses the criteria for eligibility to participate in the referendum proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council of 28 July 1993—document 2/26185, available in the House of Commons Library.

North Korea

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will agree to the Russian proposal for an international conference to discuss the Korean crisis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Russian proposal to hold a conference to discuss the security of the Korean peninsula is one of a number of responses to the situation currently being considered.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the United Nations proposed sanctions on North Korea.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the Security Council we are consulting other member states on the timing, tactics and substance of council action, including the imposition of sanctions. We shall continue to consult the other states in the region.

Somalia

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the use of DNA examinations in Somalia for proposed entrants to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Somalis applying for entry clearance as dependants of those settled in the United Kingdom are eligible for DNA testing in the same way as other nationals. DNA tests will be offered free of charge, under the Government-sponsored scheme, to first-time applicants where the entry clearance officer has doubts about the claimed relationship at the time of the application. In 1993, 19 DNA tests were conducted in Addis Ababa on Somalis applying to join family in the United Kingdom for settlement, and seven in Nairobi.

The British embassy in Mogadishu is temporarily closed.

Pakistan

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Pakistan in its capacity as a member of the Commonwealth to repeal discriminatory laws against women and offer equal opportunities for women in all fields.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We regularly urge the Government of Pakistan to ensure the protection of the human rights of all Pakistanis. The United Kingdom aid programme in Pakistan promotes the status of women, which is one of ODA's seven priority objectives.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Pakistan in relation to the ending of child labour and for a free and compulsory education system.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government of Pakistan are aware of our expectation that they will meet their obligations as a signatory to the UN convention on the rights of the child, and enforce their own Bonded Labour Systems (Abolition) Act. The United Kingdom's aid programme in Pakistan includes assistance for children's education.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Pakistan on the ending of discrimination on the basis of religion, with particular reference to the law requiring indication of religion on the national identity card.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have frequently urged the Government of Pakistan to protect the constitutional rights of religious minorities. There is no current requirement in Pakistan for religious affiliation to be indicated on national identity cards.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Pakistan about equal rights for religious minorities in Pakistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have frequently urged the Government of Pakistan to ensure that the rights of religious minorities are protected, as the country's constitution requires.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Pakistan in relation to reports of recent human rights violations in Karachi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We regularly urge the relevant Pakistani authorities to safeguard human rights. On 11 May Her Majesty's deputy high commissioner in Karachi, along with other EU representatives, discussed the situation there with the Chief Minister of Sindh.

Visitors' Entry Clearance

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the practice for Ministers to write personally to hon. Members regarding the refusal of visitors' entry clearance; and if he will ensure that all correspondence from hon. Members to Ministers receive a ministerial reply.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Ministers reply personally to all Members on questions of policy affecting the entry clearance operation at our posts overseas but not on individual cases. Usually officials in the migration and visa correspondence unit write direct to hon. Members on factual inquiries about most visa cases.

These arrangements were described in my letter of 7 July 1993 to all hon. Members. It enclosed a guidance booklet "Representations by Members of Parliament in Visa and Immigration Cases". I am sending the hon. Member another copy of each.

Whaling

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what effect the enlargement of the EU will have on the whaling industries.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Of the four applicant states, only Norway has a whaling industry. As part of its terms of accession to the European Union, Norway agreed that its policy on whales will fully respect the European Community's existing legislation.

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress being made in peace talks in Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The talks continue, but agreement has still not been reached on the issue of UNITA's participation in Government. The Angolan Government broadly accepted compromise proposals from the mediators about which posts should be given to UNITA. But UNITA has not yet accepted them. We have urged UNITA to respond positively.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current military situation in Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since February, there has been a rise in military activity by both the Government of Angola and UNITA forces. There is particularly heavy fighting around the cities of Kuito and Malanje, and Huambo has been bombed. This has resulted in an indefinite suspension of humanitarian relief flights. We have expressed concern to both parties and urged them to respect United Nations Security Council calls for all offensive military operations to cease.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the military authorities in Nigeria about the need to restore democratic Government; and what response he has had.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The presidency of the European Union made representations to the Nigerian Foreign Minister on 20 May, urging the military to take concrete steps towards a restoration of democratic civilian rule. The Foreign Minister gave assurances of the military's commitment to the national constitutional conference, due to begin on 27 June, and to hand over power.

Somalia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports have been made by the United Nation's special envoy to Somalia about whether progress is being made in respect of a constitutional conference on the future of Somalia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Secretary-General's special representative reports regularly to the Secretary General on the political, humanitarian and military situation in Somalia. These updates form the basis of the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council. The last such report was on 24 May. The Secretary General's special advisers also brief Security Council members and troop contributors on developments.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest situation in Somalia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Security Council resolution 923 of 31 May urged all parties to pursue negotiations aimed at achieving national reconciliation. We welcome the agreement signed on 18 June in Kismayo on reconciliation in the Lower Juba region. The international community are concerned at the continued delays in convening a national conference and hope that Somalis will build on the progress made in Kismayo to facilitate a national settlement.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Football Clubs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy to set up an independent regulator for Football Association Premier and Football League clubs in England.

Mr. Sproat: No. It is a matter for the football authorities.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will instigate an inquiry into the rules governing the financial arrangements of Football Association Premier League clubs.

Mr. Sproat: No.

EDUCATION

OFSTED Training

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many men and how many women aged *(a)* 30 to 40 years, *(b)* 40 to 50 years, *(c)* 50 to 60 years and *(d)* over 60 years were (i) accepted and (ii) rejected for Ofsted training as team inspectors; and how many in each category were not successful;

(2) how many courses have been organised by Ofsted for the purpose of training potential team inspectors;

(3) how many applicants for Ofsted training as team inspectors have *(a)* been accepted and *(b)* rejected; and what criteria were used in making these decisions;

(4) if he will publish information concerning the employment categories of those undertaking Ofsted training for potential team inspectors; how many in each category were *(a)* accepted for training and *(b)* unsuccessful in being approved as potential team inspectors;

(5) how many people undertaking Ofsted training courses for potential team inspectors have been *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected; what criteria were used for making these decisions; and what information has been given to unsuccessful trainees about their failure.

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the new independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many of his Department's booklets entitled "Special Educational Needs—A Guide for Parents", were printed; to whom they were circulated; and what was the overall cost.

Mr. Forth: The booklet "Special Educational Needs —A Guide for Parents" was printed and distributed as follows:

Printing

The following numbers of the Guide have been printed:

Language	*Initial print run*	*Reprint*	*Total*
English	400,000	100,000	500,000
Bengali	5,000	3,000	8,000
Chinese	5,000	1,000	6,000
Greek	3,000	1,000	4,000
Gujerati	5,000	1,000	6,000
Hindi	5,000	1,000	6,000
Punjabi	5,000	1,000	6,000
Turkish	3,000	1,000	4,000
Urdu	7,000	3,000	10,000
Vietnamese	3,000	1,000	4,000

Distribution

The initial print run of English language Guides was delivered as follows:

Recipient	*Quantity per recipient*
LEAs	1,000
Regional and district health authorities	300
Family Health Service Associations	300
Community Health Councils	300
Social services departments	10
All schools	5
NHS Trusts	5
Regional Library HQs	5
Miscellaneous (1,289 addresses)	1

Cost

The overall cost of designing and printing the initial 400,000 copies of the Guide and the production of the Guide in 9 ethnic languages was £144,500.

The Guide was distributed alongside: the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs; Circular 6/94: "The Organisation of Special Educational Provision"; a response card for further orders; and a covering letter. The total initial distribution cost for all these documents was £75,000.

Foreign Languages

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many candidates sat GCSE in a modern foreign language in 1993; and in what languages.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of candidates in England who sat GCSE in a modern language in 1993 was 402,700. The languages, in order of popularity, were French, German, Spanish, Urdu, Italian, Bengali, Russian, Chinese, Panjabi, Gujarati, modern Greek, Arabic, Turkish, Japanese, modern Hebrew, Portuguese, Hindi, Polish and other languages not listed individually. The other languages include Irish, Esperanto and Ukranian.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many candidates sat A-level in a modern foreign language in 1993; in what languages; and what were the figures five years earlier.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of candidates in England who sat GCE A-level in a modern foreign language in 1993 was 38,570 of which 26,170 were from schools. The languages, in order of popularity, were French, German, Spanish, Urdu, Italian, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, modern Greek, Panjabi, Bengali, Portuguese, Polish, Turkish, modern Hebrew, Dutch, Hindi and Danish.

No comparable figure is available for 1988, although 5,000 school leavers in 1987-88 sat a GCE A-level in a modern foreign language in that year.

Student Loans

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many students who graduated in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 1991, *(d)* 1992 and *(e)* 1993 are still in debt to the Student Loans Company; and if he will make a statement:

(2) how many students applied for student loans in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Student Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average grant received by students in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The average maintenance grants, excluding any payment for fees, received by mandatory award holders in England and Wales in the academic years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 are set out in the table. Since 1990-91 students have also had access to student loans.

Average maintenance grants to holders of mandatory awards England and Wales: 1990-91 to 1992-93

	Academic year		
	1990-91 £	*1991-92* £	[1]*1992-93* £
Average maintenance grant			
Local authority element	1,478	1,541	1,610
Assessed contributions[2]	1,025	990	940

	Academic year 1990-91 £	1991-92 £	[1]1992-93 £
Total	2,503	2,531	2,550

[1] Provisional.
[2] Assessed contributions from parents, spouses and students themselves assuming full payment of parental contributions including notional assessments in respect of students for whom only fees are paid.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Repetitive Strain Injury

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will discuss with the RSI group in north Staffordshire a research proposal to increase awareness and understanding of RSI.

Mr. Waldegrave: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its funding from the Office of Science and Technology within my Department.

I understand that the MRC is not currently supporting any research specifically into repetitive strain injury, but officials from the council are always willing to discuss and consider scientifically based, sound proposals. The prospects for funding of research into RSI will therefore depend on the nature and quality of any applications received.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the quality of the shipping communications to and from St. Helena.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The issue of shipping communications links with St. Helena is a matter which is regularly under review with the St. Helena Government. Transport communications are clearly very limited, but there has been difficulty in identifying a cost-efficient means of strengthening it.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the acquisition of a shuttle ship for St. Helena.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has decided that the search for a shuttle ship between St. Helena and Ascension Island should be discontinued for the time being. This decision, which was reached with great reluctance, followed an exhaustive four-year search, conducted with the assistance of specialist maritime consultants, which failed to identify a suitable vessel available at a cost that was not disproportionately expensive.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the wind electricity generation project for St. Helena.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 24 February, at column *397*.

We have asked the project consultants to carry out a survey of the world market for smaller-rated wind turbine generators and to report on their suitability for installation in St. Helena.

East Africa

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the droughts and famines in each of the affected countries of east Africa; and how the Overseas Development Administration and the European Union are reacting to these needs.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The World Food Programme estimates that up to 20 million people will be at risk from droughts and famine in 1994. Over 2·8 million tonnes of food aid will be needed. Britain has responded promptly. Since January, we have committed nearly 130,000 tonnes of food, including 46,500 tonnes announced by my noble Friend Baroness Chalker, the Minister for Overseas Development, on 22 June and £15 million of non-food emergency assistance. Figures for individual countries are as follows:

Food Aid (Metric Tonnes)

	Needs	United Kingdom	EC[1]
Eritrea	190,000	14,475	—
Ethiopia	955,000	45,000	264,000
Kenya	719,000	20,000	26,000
Somalia	343,000	—	800
Sudan	575,000	40,000	80,000
Tanzania	27,000	10,100	—
Uganda	24,000	68	—
Totals	2,833,000	129,643	370,800

[1] Excluding bilateral pledges from member states.

Arms Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the means to ensure independence of decisions on British overseas aid from sales of arms.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British aid funds are not linked to the sale of arms. All bilateral project proposals are subject to economic, financial, technical and environmental appraisal before they are approved, to ensure that they meet the needs and priorities of recipient countries.

Albania

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what view Her Majesty's Government have about Greece vetoing a proposed EC loan to Albania; whether he will ensure that Her Majesty's Government support such assistance to Albania; if he will discuss the issue with representatives of the Greek Government; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been on removing the Greek Government's blockage on European Union aid to Albania.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the Commission proposal for macro-economic assistance to Albania in the form of a 35 mecu grant. We regret the delay in agreeing the Commission proposal and hope that the terms of this assistance will be agreed soon.

Brazil

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what environmental conditions are attached by the European Union or any of its specialist agencies in assistance given to Brazil for the development of the Greater Carajas project; and whether those conditions have been fulfilled to date.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: EC assistance to the Greater Carajas project has been limited to a European Coal and Steel Community loan, since repaid, of 257 million ecu —£201 million—in 1982. This loan covered approximately 7 per cent. of the project's cost. There were no environmental conditions attached to the ECSC loan. The Carajas region is expected to benefit from environmental monitoring and protection measures under the pilot programme to conserve the Brazilian tropical rainforest which is being supported by the EC, the United Kingdom and other donors.

The Carajas project was discussed by the EC Development Council in November 1989. These and other discussions contributed to an EC resolution on Environment and Development that was adopted in 1992. The terms of that resolution are reflected in the legal framework for all EC aid to Latin America and in the 1992 co-operation agreement with Brazil.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he is making in the World bank negotiations with Brazil that any assistance to Brazil should be conditional upon the fulfilling of promises about the demarcation of land in the Amazon rain forest for indigenous peoples;

(2) whether the Brazilian Government have fulfilled the conditions regarding the demarcation of indigenous areas of first their World bank loan in 1982 which assisted with the development of Carajas projects.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom is not a party to negotiations between the World bank and Brazil on proposed lending. Bank staff are satisfied that all the conditions of the 1982 loan have been fully met.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken by the European Union to co-ordinate the humanitarian response to the needs of Rwanda.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since the start of the crisis European Community humanitarian assistance to the region totals about £15·2 million, in addition to substantial amounts provided bilaterally by member states. Further support is being considered. Following a decision of the European Development Council a Troika mission will assess the situation by visiting neighbouring countries in early July.

Bangladesh

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Her Majesty's Government have allocated to overseas development in Bangladesh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Britain provided more than £65 million in aid to Bangladesh in the financial year 1992-93, the last year for which figures are available.

Our aid programme supports the development of Bangladesh's natural resources, its physical infrastructure and its human resources through health and family planning, education and training. We promote good government through our assistance with economic reform, and with projects to improve the efficiency and accountability of the civil service, parliament and the judiciary.

The establishment of a new aid management office in Dhaka in October 1992 has allowed us to focus our aid more effectively on Bangladesh's development priorities.

WALES

Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to encourage public sector landlords to provide disabled people with personal housing plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I expect publicly funded housing bodies dealing with disabled people fully to address their housing needs.

Birds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by estate, those occasions on which birds belonging to protected species have been found *(a)* shot, *(b)* poisoned or *(c)* otherwise illegally killed in each of the past five years; and what were the number of (i) prosecutions and (ii) convictions which have resulted.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of birds of protected species poisoned in Wales in each of the last five years is:

Year	*Number of birds poisoned*
1989	12
1990	2
1991	3
1992	7
1993	7

No information on poisonings is held by estate and none of the other information sought is held centrally.

Consultants (Merit Awards)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number and total cost of merit awards currently made to consultants for each health authority in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Responsibility for funding the cost of existing and new awards was devolved to health authorities in 1991-92. Information on the number and total cost of merit awards currently made to consultants for each health authority in Wales is not held centrally.

Rural Primary Schools

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many rural primary schools with a pupil attendance of 30 or less there were in Wales in *(a)* 1973, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not available prior to 1976 and rural schools cannot be identified separately. Comparable data for the number of primary schools in Wales with up to 25 pupils on roll for 1976, 1985 and 1993 are given in the following table. Data on schools with up to 30 pupils are not readily available.

Number of schools

	January 1976	*January 1985*	*January 1993*
Number of pupils on roll			
Up to 25	106	114	61
26 or more	1,853	1,682	1,636
TOTAL	1,959	1,796	1,697

Source: Schools Census Returns.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that in cases other than a major incident, as encompassed in "Welsh Affairs Circular (93)69", no chief ambulance officer or his staff shall release information to the press following a 999 call requiring the attendance of an ambulance at a serious road accident.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are no central guidelines for the release of information, by chief ambulance officers, to the media in the event of a 999 call to a serious road accident. The national health service has an overriding responsibility to respect the confidential nature of the relationship with its patients and should not disclose personal information without the patient's consent, other than in the most exceptional of circumstances.

Infertility

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to clarify the position regarding the provision of fertility services in West Glamorgan.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision of fertility services is a matter for West Glamorgan health authority, which will take into account need, competing demands and available resources.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what provision is made for infertility investigation in Mid-Glamorgan health authority.

(2) what is the provision for infertility treatment in Mid-Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision for infertility investigation and treatment is a matter for Mid Glamorgan health authority, which will take into account need, competing demands and available resources.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice Mid-Glamorgan health authority has sought from his Department as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice the South Glamorgan health authority has sought from her Department as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what are the differences in duration of fertility treatment between West Glamorgan area health authority area and South Glamorgan area health authority area;

(2) what waiting lists are maintained in each of the area health authority area in Wales for fertility treatment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what provision is made for infertility treatment by the South Glamorgan health authority;

(2) what provision is made for infertility investigation as regards the South Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision for infertility investigation and treatment is a matter for South Glamorgan health authority which will take into account need, competing demands and available resources.

Road Schemes

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which road schemes have been authorised in the last 10 years which had a negative net present value; and which road schemes in the last 10 years have been rejected at the public inquiry stage or beyond because they had a negative net present value.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Social Services

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for developing the inspection of social services in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In June 1993, I published a consultation document "Inspecting Social Services in Wales". This set out proposals for applying three key principles of the citizens charter—that inspectors should be independent of the services they inspect, that lay people should be involved in inspections, and that inspection reports should be accessible to the public.

I intend that during 1994 there should be clear and demonstrable progress, both nationally and locally, towards the wider implementation of the citizens charter principles.

The social services inspectorate for Wales has already made considerable progress. For some years its inspection reports have been available to the public. A small group is being established to advise on the social services inspectorate's inspection work; half its membership will represent service users, carers and wider lay interests, and half will be drawn from local authorities and providers of services in the independent sector. Since February 1994, inspection teams have begun to include lay assessors; inspection reports will take full account of their views and observations.

I propose to issue shortly, for a brief consultation, draft guidance on how the same principles should be applied to the work of "arms-length" inspection units in local authority special services departments.

The new guidance will give local authority chief executives the important role of commissioning independent annual reports on the work of inspection units. These reports will focus on whether units apply the same standards to both local authority and independent provision, and on how effectively local authorities respond when improvements are shown to be needed.

The guidance will call for a change in the composition of advisory committees for inspection units. By the end of 1994 the numbers of lay people unconnected with the authority should be increased so that they form a majority on advisory committees.

I intend, too, that during 1994 we will begin to see lay people involved in social services inspections, and their views reflected in inspection reports. It will not be possible to include lay people in every inspection, but there must be substantial lay involvement on a regular and continuing basis.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, by grade, the numbers of full-time academic staff funded by the further education budget for each further education college on 1 October in each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The tables list the information requested for 1992 and 1993. The figures for years prior to this are not readily available.

Table 1
List of staff by grade in institutions of further education at 1 October 1992

College	Principal	Vice-principal	Head of department	Principal lecturer	Senior lecturer	Lecturer
Belfast Institute	1	5	21	21	134	286
Omagh	1	1	4	—	7	54
Newtownabbey	1	1	3	—	11	73
Ballymoney	1	—	2	—	3	14
Antrim	1	—	4	—	3	23
Ballymena	1	1	5	—	9	82
Larne	1	—	3	—	2	32
Hotel and Catering	1	—	1	—	1	16
Coleraine	1	1	4	—	3	44
Magherafelt	1	—	3	—	2	35
Armagh	1	1	4	—	6	54
Newry/Kilkeel	1	1	5	—	10	69
Lurgan	1	—	3	—	4	39
Portadown	1	1	4	1	10	71
Banbridge	1	—	2	—	3	22
East Tyrone	1	1	4	—	3	55
North Down	1	2	4	1	17	81
Lisburn	1	1	3	—	10	50
Down	1	1	4	—	7	43
Newcastle	1	—	2	—	2	18
Castlereagh	1	1	4	—	11	50
North-West	1	2	8	4	38	79
Fermanagh	1	1	3	—	7	52
Limavady	1	1	4	—	2	24

Table 2
List of staff by grade in institutions of further education at 1 October 1993

College	Principal	Vice-principal	Head of department	Principal lecturer	Senior lecturer	Lecturer
Belfast Institute	1	6	19	22	132	299
Omagh	1	1	4	—	5	53
Newtownabbey	1	1	3	—	11	76
Ballymoney	1	—	1	—	3	15
Antrim	1	—	4	—	5	23
Ballymena	1	1	5	—	11	64
Larne	1	—	3	—	2	31
Hotel and Catering	1	—	1	—	2	19
Coleraine	1	1	4	—	5	45
Magherafelt	1	—	3	—	3	30
Armagh	1	1	4	—	6	48
Newry/Kilkeel	1	1	5	—	9	70
Lurgan	1	—	3	—	4	44
Portadown	1	1	4	1	9	72
Banbridge	1	—	1	—	3	23
East Tyrone	1	1	3	—	8	46
North Down	1	2	4	1	24	75
Lisburn	1	—	3	—	9	51
Down	—	1	4	—	6	47
Newcastle	1	—	2	—	4	20

College	Principal	Vice-principal	Head of department	Principal lecturer	Senior lecturer	Lecturer
Castlereagh	1	1	4	—	9	55
North-West	1	2	8	4	37	94
Fermanagh	1	1	3	—	7	47
Limavady	1	1	4	—	5	25

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional resources have been made available to *(a)* the North Eastern, *(b)* the Southern and *(c)* the South Eastern education and library boards in order to assist with the amalgamation of further education colleges in their respective areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The additional resources for administrative costs incurred by the board are as follows:

Board	1993-94 £	1994-95 £
(a) North-Eastern Education and Library Board	52,000	45,000
(b) Southern Education and Library Board	17,000	10,000
(c) South-Eastern Education and Library Board	17,000	10,000

In addition the Department of Education will adjust the boards' indicative allocation for premature retirement redundancy lump sums. These payments will not therefore be a charge on the boards' block grant.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what study his Department has made of the differential growth rates across colleges of further education; what measures he has taken or intends to take in order to reform the method of funding further education colleges in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: There has been no such study; nor are there any immediate plans for a new funding methodology. Measures have been taken to eradicate as far as possible historical imbalances in the allocation of resources to the education and library boards for further education.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by college, the number of redundancies, both voluntary and compulsory that have taken place in Northern Ireland during the following academic years between 1988-89 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Details are available only for further education lecturers who have been awarded premature retirement pensions on the grounds of redundancy since 1990:

College of further education	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Belfast Institute	—	—	—	6
North West Institute	1	—	—	—
Omagh	—	—	—	3
Fermanagh	—	—	1	—
Limavady	—	—	—	—
Ballymena	2	—	—	—
Antrim	—	—	—	—
Coleraine	—	1	1	—
Newtownabbey	—	—	—	—
Ballymoney	1	—	—	—
Magherafelt	—	—	—	—
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College	—	1	—	—
Larne	—	2	—	—
Newcastle	1	—	1	—
Castlereagh	2	—	—	—
North Down and Ards	—	—	—	—
Lisburn	3	1	—	—
Down	—	—	—	—
Portadown	—	—	—	—
East Tyrone	—	—	—	—
Banbridge	—	—	—	—
Armagh	—	—	—	—
Newry/Kilkeel	—	—	—	—
Lurgan	—	3	—	—
Total	10	8	3	9

Note:
Lecturers in the Youth Training Programme have not been included.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications have been made to the Belfast institute during the past two years from applicants wishing to undertake full-time higher education courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Belfast institute does not maintain an annual record of applications for higher education courses. The institute estimates that the applications received in each of the academic years 1992-93 and 1993-94 would be approximately 1,200 to 1,500.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what resources were specifically allocated in order to fund general national vocational qualifications in schools and further education colleges in Northern Ireland during 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The resources allocated to fund GNVQs in Northern Ireland are related to the phased introduction of specific areas of study which were delivered mainly through the futher education sector. The additional funding allocated to further education in each of the academic years was:

Year	*£*
1992-93	30,000
1993-94	71,000

Colleges could also draw, in 1993-94, on resources under the further education programme. £157,400 was allocated to the education and library boards to support curriculum development for specific vocational areas and £558,000 was allocated for staff development, where GNVQ was among the identified priorities.

Funding of £65,000 for 1994-95 is expected to be allocated to phase III of the GNVQ pilot when it is introduced in September 1994.

No specific additional funds have been provided to schools for GNVQ. Under local management of schools, schools wishing to develop new courses must do so from within their allocated budget. Those schools participating with colleges benefit from staff and curriculum development, resource materials and teaching time provided by the colleges.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by individual school and further education college the total budget allocated to each participating institution to fund GNVQs during *(a)* 1992-93, *(b)* 1993-94 and *(c)* 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Funding for GNVQs has been provided specifically for the pilot phases, which are being delivered mainly through the further education sector. Schools participating with the colleges benefit from staff and curriculum development, resource materials and teaching time provided by the colleges.

A list of schools and further education colleges with their budgets is as follows:

	£
1992-93	
Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (St. Patrick's High School participated in the pilot of Manufacturing)	13,000
North West Institute of Further and Higher Education (Thornhill College, Foyle and Londonderry College and St. Mary's School participated in the pilot of Business; St. Mary's High in Health and Social Care)	13,000
Castlereagh College of Further Education (Lagan College participated in the pilot of Business)	4,000
Total allocation	30,000
1993-94	
Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education	30,000
North West Institute of Further and Higher Education	28,000
Castlereagh College of Further Education (Ashfield Boys and Girls High School participated in the pilot of Manufacturing)	3,500
Newcastle College of Further Education (St. Malachy's High School Castlewellan participated in the pilot of Manufacturing)	3,500
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College	6,000
Total allocation	71,000

Funding of £65,000 for 1994-95 is expected to be allocated by my Department when it is known which courses will be taken up by the colleges and schools in September 1994.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of temporary teachers paid on a daily rate who were employed by each college for periods longer than 26 weeks during each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows for each academic year:

College of Further Education	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993 to date*
Belfast Institute	20	9	4
North West Institute	4	3	1
Omagh	2	4	2
Fermanagh	3	1	—
Limavady	—	—	—
Ballymena	9	4	2
Antrim	2	—	—
Coleraine	1	—	—
Newtownabbey	2	2	3
Ballymoney	2	—	—
Magherafelt	1	1	—
NI Hotel and Catering College	—	1	—
Larne	—	—	—
Newcastle	2	1	1
Castlereagh	2	3	3
North Down and Ards	9	16	5
Lisburn	—	—	—
Down	—	—	—
Portadown	7	5	3
East Tyrone	1	—	—
Banbridge	—	1	—
Armagh	—	1	—
Newry/Kilkeel	3	3	2
Lurgan	—	1	1
Total	70	56	27

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans his Department has to permit the Belfast Institute to provide full-time higher level courses in catering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: I have discussed this issue with a delegation from the college led by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and have agreed to consider it further when evidence of demand for such courses is provided.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the average unit of resource funding

per further education student in Northern Ireland for each of the past five years; what was the average unit of resource funding for each trainee in a training centre for the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: It is only possible to calculate the average unit of resource funding per full-time equivalent further education student in Northern Ireland on an equitable basis since 1991. Capital costs and student grants are not included. Figures beyond 1992-93 are not yet available:

	£
1991-92	2,224
1992-93	2,311

I have been advised by the chief executive of the Training and Employment Agency that the average unit of resources funding for a trainee in a training centre, including capital costs and excluding the training allowances paid to individuals is:

	£
1989-90	4,902
1990-91	5,418
1991-92	5,826
1992-93	6,716
1993-94	5,499

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional resources have been made available to the Belfast education and library board in order to assist with the amalgamation of further education colleges; if he will provide a breakdown of these additional resources in relation to their specific purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: An additional £40,000 was provided in 1990-91 to support the secondment of four senior lecturers.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by college and by individual case the number of industrial tribunal and fair employment tribunal applications lodged against further education colleges for each year since 1989; how many cases have been upheld against the further education colleges and how many cases have resulted in a settlement which has involved payments being made by an education and library board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The following information has been provided by the education and library boards:

College	*Type of case*	*Result*	*Compensation*
1990			
1. Lisburn	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
2. Lisburn	Fair employment tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
3. Newtownabbey	Industrial tribunal	Agreed settlement before hearing	Yes
4. North Antrim	Industrial tribunal	Agreed settlement before hearing	Yes
1991			
1. Portadown	Fair employment tribunal	Settled before tribunal hearing	Yes
2. Portadown	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
3. Lisburn	Industrial tribunal	Case dismissed by tribunal	—
4. North Down	Fair employment tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
5. Antrim	Industrial tribunal	Case settled by written agreement	—
6. North Antrim	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
7. Coleraine	Industrial tribunal	Agreement before tribunal hearing	Yes
8. Omagh	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
9. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Applicant won case	Yes
10. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
11. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Applicant won case	Yes
1992			
1. East Tyrone	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
2. Lurgan	Industrial tribunal	Settled by agreement with parties	Yes
3. Portadown	Fair employment tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
4. Lurgan	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
5. East Tyrone	Industrial tribunal	Hearing held pending decision on another case	—
6. Newcastle	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing – Awaiting decision on another case	—
7. Lisburn	Industrial tribunal	Case dismissed by tribunal	—

College	Type of case	Result	Compensation
8. Lisburn	Industrial tribunal	Case dismissed by tribunal	—
9. Lisburn	Industrial tribunal	Case dismissed by tribunal	—
10. Newcastle	Fair employment tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
11. Newcastle	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
12. Newcastle	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
13. Newcastle	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
14. Newcastle	Fair employment tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
15. Newcastle	Fair employment tribunal	Result awaited	—
16. North Down	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
17. Ballymena	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
18. North West Institute	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
19. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
20. Belfast Institute	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
21. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
22. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
23. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Settled before hearing	Yes
1993			
1. East Tyrone	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
2. North Down	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—
3. Newtownabbey	Fair employment tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
4. Omagh	Fair employment tribunal	Ongoing	—
5. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
6. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
7. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
8. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
9. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Withdrawn by applicant	—
1994			
1. Newry	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—
2. Newry	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—
3. Newry	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—
4. Newry	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—
5. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—
6. Belfast Institute	Industrial tribunal	Ongoing	—

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to make a public response to the report of the review group led by Noel Stewart; what additional resources his Department will make available to further education colleges in Northern Ireland in order to fund investment in accommodation and equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Government responded to the report of the review group in their statement of 9 February 1993. There are no plans for any further statements. Funding for the further education sector is determined in the light of available resources and relative priorities for expenditure.

School Pupils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils are at each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary and higher level schools in (i) the controlled sector, (ii) the maintained sector and (iii) the integrated sector in the constituency of Newry and Armagh.

Mr. Ancram: The 1993-94 enrolment figures are as follows:—

	Numbers
(a) (i) Controlled primary schools	
Aghavilly, Milford	77
Annaghmore, Portadown	88
Armstrong, Armagh	376
Bessbrook, Newry	98
Cabra, Tandragee, Portadown	24
Clare, Tandragee, Craigavon	62
Collone, Armagh	123
Corrtamlet, Altnamachin	35
Darkley, Armagh	128
Derryhale, Portadown	63
Drumhillery, Middletown	55
Drumsallen, Killylea	54
Foley, Tassagh	85
Hamiltonsbawn, Armagh	112
Hardy Memorial, Richill	451
Keady, Armagh	46
Killylea, Armagh	76
Kingsmills, Whitecross	34
Lisdrumchor, Glenanne	27
Lisnadill, Armagh	81
Markethill Primary, Armagh	223
Mountnorris, Armagh	69
Mullaghglass, Newry	73
Mullavilly, Tandragee	82
Newry Model, Newry	36
Newtownhamilton, Newry	106
Poyntzpass, Newry	64
Tandragee, Tandragee	308
The Cope, Loughgall	123
Tullyroan, Dungannon	45
Windsor Hill, Newry	198

	Numbers
(ii) Maintained Primary Schools	
Anamar, Crossmaglen, Newry	75
Armagh Christian Bros, Armagh	451
Carrickrovaddy, Newtownhamilton	39
Clady (St. Michael's), Armagh	39
Clay, Keady, Armagh	60
Clonalig, Newry	151
Cloughoge, Newry	310
Collegeland, Dungannon	32
Drelincourt Infants, Armagh	39
Dromintee, Killeavy	137
Glassdrummond, Middletown	82
Jonesborough, Newry	127
Killeen, Newry	114
Lissummon, Newry	29
Loughgall	31
Middletown Boys', Armagh	56
Mount St. Catherine's, Armagh	429
Newtownhamilton (St. Michael's)	103
Our Lady's, Keady	40
St. Brigid's, Crossmaglen	139
St. Brigid's, Belleeks	77
St. Clare's, Keady	204
St. Clare's Convent, Newry	609
St. Colman's Abbey, Newry	686
St. Colman's-Saval, Newry	109
St. Colmcille's, Armagh	30
St. James', Markethill	52
St. James', Tandragee	54
St. Jarlath's, Blackwaterstown	128
St. Joseph's, Convent, Newry	447
St. Joseph's, Armagh	137
St. Joseph's, Poyntzpass, Newry	81
St. Joseph's, Killeavy	195
St. Joseph's, Bessbrook, Newry	355
St. Lawrence's, Belleeks	46
St. Louis' Convent, Middletown	46
St. Malachy's, Ballymoughan	64
St. Malachy's, Chapel Lane, Armagh	213
St. Malachy's, Camlough, Newry	242
St. Malachy's, Carnagat, Newry	466

	Numbers
St. Mary's Boys', Keady, Armagh	191
St. Mary's, Tassagh, Armagh	77
St. Mary's, Jerrettspass, Newry	50
St. Mary's, Mullaghbawn, Newry	198
St. Mochua's, Keady, Armagh	109
St. Oliver Plunkett, Forkhill	92
St. Oliver Plunkett, Kilmore	97
St. Patrick's Boys' Newry	335
St. Patrick's, Crossmaglen, Newry	295
St. Patrick's, Armagh	550
St. Patrick's, Cullyhanna, Newry	247
St. Colman's Saval, Newry	109
St. Peter's, Bessbrook	255
Tullyheron, Mountnorris	54
Tullymore, Armagh	58
Tullysaran, Armagh	77
(iii) Integrated Primary Schools	
Saints and Scholars, Armagh	26

(b) Secondary schools

	Numbers
(i) *Controlled secondary*	
Armagh Secondary School	574
Markethill High	456
Newry High	569
Newtownhamilton High	99
Tandragee Junior High	316
(ii) *Maintained secondary schools*	
St. Brigid's High, Armagh	209
St. Catherine's College, Armagh	956
St. Joseph's Boys' High, Newry	391
St. Joseph's High, Crossmaglen	600
St. Mary's Girls' High, Newry	574
St. Patrick's High, Keady	902
St. Paul's High, Newry	1,325

(iii) There are no integrated secondary schools in this area.

There are no sixth form colleges in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils attend each secondary and higher level college in *(a)* the maintained sector, *(b)* the controlled sector and *(c)* the integrated sector in the constituency of Strangford.

Mr. Ancram: The 1993-94 enrolment figures are as follows:

	Numbers
Maintained Secondary Schools	
St. Columba's High School, Portaferry	363
Controlled Secondary and Grammar Schools	
Comber High School, Newtownards	460
Donaghadee High School	294
Glastry High School, Ballyhalbert	554
Movilla High School, Newtownards	752
Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards	1,428
Scrabo High School, Newtownards	364
Integrated Secondary Schools	
Lagan College, Castlereagh	849

There are no 6th Form Colleges in Northern Ireland.

School Pupils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils attend each primary school in *(a)* the maintained sector, *(b)* the controlled sector and *(c)* the integrated sector in the constituency of Strangford.

Mr. Ancram: The 1993-94 enrolment figures are as follows:

	Number
(a) Maintained Primary Schools	
St. Anne's, Donaghadee	38
St. Finian's, Newtownards	190
St. Mary's, Comber	33
St. Mary's, Ballygowan	66
St. Mary's, Kircubbin	225
St. Mary's, Portaferry	313
St. Patrick's, Portaferry	89
(b) Controlled Primary Schools	
Abbey, Newtownards	523
Alexander Dickson, Ballygowan	213
Andrews Memorial, Comber	511
Ballykeigle, Comber	66
Ballyvester, Donaghadee	89
Ballywalter, Newtownards	141
Belvoir Park, Belfast	276
Branfel, Belfast	290
Cairnshill, Newtownbreda	430
Carrickmannon, Ballygowan	75
Carrowdore, Newtownards	136
Castle Gardens, Newtownards	441
Comber, Newtownards	399
Cottown, Bangor	28
Donaghadee	435
Greyabbey, Newtownards	71
Killinchy, Comber	223
Kircubbin, Newtownards	58
Kirkistown, Cloughey	31
Leadhill, Belfast	187
Londonderry Model, Newtownards	292
Loughries, Newtownards	93
Millisle, Newtownards	171
Moneyrea, Newtownards	134
Newtownards Model, Newtownards	365
Newtownbreda, Belfast	225
O'Neill Memorial, Belfast	41
Portavogie	148
Portaferry	44
Regent House Prep Department	172
Victoria, Ballyhalbert	100
Victoria, Newtownards	556
West Winds, Newtownards	194

There are no integrated primary schools in the constituency of Strangford.

Birds (Illegal Killing)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, by estate, those occasions on which birds belonging to protected species have been found *(a)* shot, *(b)* poisoned or *(c)* otherwise illegally killed in each of the past five years; and what is the number of (i) prosecutions and (ii) convictions which have resulted.

Mr. Tim Smith: Records are not kept by estate of those occasions on which birds belonging to protected species have been found *(a)* shot *(b)* poisoned or *(c)* otherwise illegally killed.

The figures set out in the table list by year for Northern Ireland as a whole (i) the numbers of birds which the Department knows to have been shot, poisoned or illegally killed; (ii) prosecutions and (iii) convictions.

	Birds			*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
	Shot	*Poisoned*	*Otherwise illegally killed*		
1989	5	8	Nil	5	5
1990	Nil	Nil	Nil	—	—
1991	Nil	1	3	1	1
1992	1	2	Nil	1	1
1993	Nil	3	Nil	1	1

Building Regulations

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce new building regulations or amend existing building regulations, to promote the development of barrier-free housing in terms of *(a)* new build and *(b)* renovated or modernised properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment intends, in conjunction with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to consult on a range of building regulation provisions which could be applied to the design of new dwellings for the benefit of disabled people.

Northern Ireland maintains its own building regulations and I will bring forward proposals, once the new requirements for England and Wales are known.

There are no plans to consider the applications of such requirements to existing dwellings subject to renovation or modernisation.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to encourage public sector landlords to provide disabled people with personal housing plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: The administration of public sector housing, including assessment of need, is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. For special needs groups, the Housing Executive co-operates with the relevant health and social services area board to determine the most suitable accommodation and care, including the design or adaptation of dwellings, to meet the specific needs of the disabled occupant.

The Housing Executive also provides a range of services to disabled people and carries out approximately 7,400 major and minor adaptations per year.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of Northern Ireland's housing stock is constructed or adapted to meet the needs of physically disabled people at the latest date for which information is available; if he will break this information down into categories of housing tenure; what plans he has to enhance the availability of such housing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith: The information is not available in the form requested. I have, however, been advised by the chief

executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that the 1991 house condition survey indicates that 80 per cent. of tenures in the owner-occupied, Housing Executive and housing association sectors provided at least level access to one entrance while for the private rented sector the figure is 63 per cent., and 30 per cent. of all tenures provide both level access and all facilities on the same level.

Since 1985 all new Housing Executive and housing association properties have been built to mobility standard on the ground floor to facilitate elderly and disabled people.

The Executive and housing associations normally carry out around 7,500 major and minor adaptations to dwellings each year. The Executive also expects to provide assistance to the private sector through approximately 3,000 applications for disabled facilities grants and minor works grants each year.

Public Houses

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many licensed public houses there have been in Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1984	1,845
1985	1,832
1986	1,783
1987	1,735
1988	1,733
1989	1,700
1990	1,684
1991	1,695
1992	1,665
1993	1,643

Consultants (Merit Awards)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number and total cost of merit awards currently made to consultants for each health authority in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The number of distinction and meritorious service awards currently made to consultants in Northern Ireland is:

	Number
A+	8
A	27
B	60
C	137
Total	232

The total cost of distinction and meritorious service awards made to consultants in the 1992-93 financial year is as follows:

	1992-93 £
Eastern Health and Social Services Board	1,856,823
Northern Health and Social Services Board	267,694
Southern Health and Social Services Board	254,089
Western Health and Social Services Board	243,289
Total	2,621,895

Community Services

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent by each district council in Northern Ireland on community services in 1993-94; and how much was spent per head of population in each district.

Mr. Ancram: As the 1993-94 accounts of the district councils have not been finalised, the information is not available at present.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of persons serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as at 1 May in the ranks of *(a)* constable, *(b)* sergeant, *(c)* inspector, *(d)* chief inspector, *(e)* superintendent and *(f)* chief superintendent; and if he will give the numbers in each rank who are believed to be CB1 (Protestant origin), CB2 (Roman Catholic) and CB3 (other).

Sir John Wheeler: The number of persons serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary by rank and perceived community background is collated annually. The following statistics relate to 31 December 1993.

Rank	*Number of officers*	*CB1*	*CB2*	*CB3*
Constable	6,232	5,575	454	203
Sergeant	1,408	1,261	123	24
Inspector	489	427	45	17
Chief Inspector	164	140	22	2
Superintendent	123	103	17	3
Chief Superintendent	42	34	7	1

Paramilitary Groups

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of persons suspected of being loyalist paramilitary members and those suspected of being republican paramilitary members who were arrested in each police sub-division between July 1992 and May 1993; how many in each category were subsequently charged; and what were the figures in each case for the period July 1993 to May 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: The available information is for the whole of Northern Ireland and is as follows:

Date	Total arrests	Suspect loyalists charged	Suspect republicans charged
1 July 1992 to 31 May 1993	1,531	208	233
1 July 1993 to 31 May 1994	1,638	149	132

A breakdown by police sub-division, and information on how many of the individuals arrested were suspected members of loyalist or republican groups, is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

United Nations 50th Anniversary

Sir James Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements he is proposing to make to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: None at present.

SCOTLAND

Rent Registration Service

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of rents asked for by the landlords and the level of rents determined by the rent officers in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I assume that the hon. Member is seeking information on the total sum of rents claimed by landlords and the total sum of rents determined by the rent registration service. In the case of rents determined for housing benefit subsidy, it was estimated on the basis of a 90 per cent. sample of cases recorded for 1993, that the total sum of rents referred to the rent registration service was around £145 million and the total sum of rents determined was around £131 million. Similar information relating to the determination of fair rents is not available.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to exclude cartels of private landlords from submitting tenders under market testing of the rent registration service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If market testing takes place, each bid will be considered on its merits to ensure that there is no conflict of interest. The Secretary of State would need to be satisfied that this had been addressed so that any risk of bias on the part of a potential contractor is eliminated. Otherwise the particular bid would be excluded from the tender evaluation process.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to safeguard *(a)* private sector tenants and *(b)* the public purse from rents being raised following a successful bid for running the rent registration service being accepted from an organisation other than the current service provided by civil servants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All the existing legislation which applies to the determination of rents by rent officers would continue to apply to any rent registration service providers that might be appointed. This would include provision for appeals to rent assessment committees on fair rents and the existing powers of the courts.

Road Schemes

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which road schemes have been authorised in the last 10 years which had a negative net present value; and which road schemes in the last 10 years have been rejected at the public inquiry stage or beyond, because they had a negative net present value.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The roads directorate records show that in the last 10 years three road schemes authorised between 1985 and 1988 had an estimated small negative net present value. These schemes are listed below:

(1) A75 Dumfries Bypass
(2) A90 (A94) Parkford—Balnabreich
(3) A90 (A94) Upper North Water Bridge—Oatyhill.

Post-evaluation studies on outturn costs and benefits have been completed on the first two schemes which show a significant positive net present value.

There have been no road schemes in the last 10 years which have been rejected at the public inquiry stage or beyond, because they had a negative net present value.

Betting and Gaming

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will bring forward proposals to allow payment of prizes from amusement-with-prizes machines to be made in cash, rather than replayable tokens.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This matter is under review.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the levels of investment by Scottish Enterprise, including its offshoots, and each local enterprise company in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland since 1990; if he will also give details of legally committed and planned expenditure by each on the same basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The information sought by the hon. Member is not available on a parliamentary constituency basis.

Strathclyde Police

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in relation to policing in the 'K' divisions of Strathclyde police following local government reform; if it will be possible for this police division to remain as an operational unit in the event that the new local authorities' areas dissect its boundaries; what decision-making mechanisms will determine whether the division will remain as an operational unit; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The policing of particular divisions of police forces is an operational matter for which the relevant chief constable is responsible. Decisions relating to the divisional boundaries within forces following local government reform will be a matter for chief constables and police authorities.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will undertake a feasibility study into the need for an operational police station within the Gleniffer division of Strathclyde regional council; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The need for operational police stations and their locations are matters for the police authority and the chief constable to decide.

Warrant Sales

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to abolish warrant sales as a means of collecting debt; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Warrant sales act as an ultimate sanction within a range of remedies available to the creditor for recovery of all types of debt. The system of warrant sales was reformed by the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987. These reforms removed the most resented and harsh aspects of the procedure. The Government have no plans at present for further major reform of these arrangements.

Paper Industry

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what economic initiatives he is supporting which will encourage the development of paper processing and treatment as an industry; and if he will make a statement on the importance of the paper and board industry to Scotland in general, and Renfrewshire in particular.

Mr. Stewart: The paper industry in Scotland has access to a wide range of advice and assistance from the Scottish Office and the enterprise network. Advice is available on, for example, exports, technology and best management practice; and regional selective financial assistance may be available for capital investment projects in assisted areas such as Renfrewshire.

The latest census of employment shows that, in 1991, the paper and board industry in Scotland employed 12,450 people, of whom 270 were employed in Renfrewshire. The industry makes an important contribution to the Scottish economy.

Physiotherapy

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average waiting time for physiotherapy services in each of Scotland's health board areas.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not collected centrally.

Voter Registration

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he has made in obtaining information on how many British citizens living overseas are registered for voting in each constituency in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the information I gave in answer to his question on 3 February 1994. My understanding is that information is intended to be published by OPCS in the late summer.

Gateside School, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has available on the provision of special needs education at Gateside school, Paisley; how many pupils attend the school; what is the current catchment area of the school; what proportion of children are transported to the school because they do not reside within its vicinity; how much the school cost to run in the most recent year for which figures are available; what was the annual cost per pupil in the same financial year; how many *(a)* teaching, *(b)* specialist, *(c)* auxiliary, *(d)* administrative and *(e)* manual staff are employed at the school; how many posts are currently unfilled; what is the reason for each unfilled post; what are the grades and designations of the unfilled posts; where is the nearest alternative school providing similar educational services to a similar age group; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: Strathclyde regional council education authority has responsibility for Gateside school which provides for pre-five children with hearing impairment. In September 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, the school roll was 19 and two full-time teachers were employed. All children attended on a part-time basis, the full-time equivalent being 14. The total budgeted running cost for 1993-94 was £101,000 which equates to a budget cost per pupil of £7,210. The other information requested is not held centrally.

The Government's policy is that parents in Scotland of children with special educational needs should have a choice of educational provision for their child, including special schools such as Gateside. It is, of course, for each education authority to support and arrange such provision for children in their area with special educational needs.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding is made available by his Department to Gateside school for deaf children in Paisley; how funding arrangements will change in future years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office does not fund Gateside school directly. The level of expenditure incurred in respect of the school is a matter for the education authority, Strathclyde regional council, which receives support for its expenditure on education services through aggregate external finance. There are no plans to change the existing arrangements.

Police Salaries

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the salary range of each rank of police officer in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current salaries of police officers, by rank, are as follows:

	Incremental salary point[1] *with effect from 1 September 1993* £	*Annual salary with effect from 1 September 1993* £
Chief Constable		
Population band up to 400,000[2]	57,720	56,313

	Incremental salary point[1] with effect from 1 September 1993 £	Annual salary with effect from 1 September 1993 £
400,000—500,000	59,184	57,738
500,000—750,000	61,632	60,129
750,000—1,250,000	64,074	62,511
1,250,000—2,000,000	68,964	67,281
over 2,000,000	73,368	71,580
Deputy Chief Constable		
Population band up to		
400,000	50,850	49,605
400,000—500,000	50,850	49,605
500,000—750,000	50,850	49,605
750,000—1,250,000	51,258	50,010
1,250,000—2,000,000	55,170	53,826
over 2,000,000	58,695	57,264
Assistant Chief Constable	48,426	47,241
Chief Superintendent		
On promotion	—	40,071
After 1 year	—	40,644
2 years	—	41,556
3 years	—	42,549
Off-scale point	—	42,696
Superintendent		
On promotion	—	36,042
After 1 year	—	36,960
2 years	—	37,875
3 years	—	39,135
Off-scale point	—	39,177
Chief Inspector		
On promotion	—	26,496
After 1 year	—	27,237
2 years	—	27,978
3 years	—	28,722
4 years	—	29,472
Inspector		
On promotion	—	23,337
After 1 year	—	24,066
2 years	—	25,005
3 years	—	25,749
4 years	—	26,496
Sergeant		
On promotion	—	20,343
After 1 year	—	21,267
2 years	—	22,014
3 years	—	22,743
4 years	—	23,337
Constable		
On appointment	—	12,744
After 1 year	—	13,626
2 years[3]	—	16,044
3 years	—	16,422
4 years	—	16,965
5 years	—	17,547
6 years	—	18,105
7 years	—	18,666
8 years	—	19,218
12 years	—	20,343
15 years	—	21,267

[1] Payable to chief police officers with a minimum of 3 years' completed service in their rank.

[2] Chief constables who were in post on this population band at the time of the agreement on the 1984 pay review received a personal salary supplement of £500 (pensionable) while they remained in their present posts; this is increased to £954 with effect from 1 September 1993.

[3] Entry point for those aged 22 or over, who will move to the next point after 3 years' service.

Lace Manufacturing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what economic initiatives he is supporting to encourage the development of the lace manufacturing industry in Scotland; and if he will make a statement on the importance of this industry to Scotland in general, and Renfrewshire in particular.

Mr. Stewart: The lace industry in Scotland has access to a wide range of advice and assistance from the Scottish Office and the enterprise network. The industry has derived particular benefit from the Scottish Lace Guild, which was established in 1991 with assistance from Scottish Enterprise and Enterprise Ayrshire.

The latest census of employment shows that, in 1991, the lace industry in Scotland employed 490 people, all of whom were employed in Ayrshire. The industry makes a useful contribution to the economy of that area; I am not aware that the industry has a significant presence in Renfrewshire.

Emergency Services

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to bring forward legislation to deal more effectively with hoax calls to the emergency services; if he intends to take any additional action within his current range of powers to deal with this menace; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to bring forward further legislation in respect of such calls, the making of which is already an offence. Means of dealing with this problem are kept under review, and there is evidence that the frequency of hoax calls is diminishing.

Regional and European Elections

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what individual amounts are payable to *(a)* returning officers, *(b)* deputy returning officers, *(c)* presiding officers at polling stations, *(d)* polling clerks, *(e)* supervisors at election counts, *(f)* counting clerks and *(g)* other grades for their duties relating to both the regional council and European elections in 1994; if he will publish a table showing the amount paid or due to be paid in respect of each of these elections to each returning officer and deputy returning officer in Scotland; what costs returning officers and deputy returning officers are required to meet from these payments; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no locus with regard to the payments made to returning officers and their staffs at regional elections. Such payments are the responsibility of the authorities concerned.

With regard to the 1994 European parliamentary elections, the amounts payable to returning officers and their staffs are contained in The European Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officers' Charges) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1379) which came into force on 1 June 1994. The

costs to be met by returning officers in running the elections are also set out in this order. Details of the information needed to calculate amounts payable to individual returning officers have not yet been forwarded to the Scottish Office Home and Health Department by the returning officers concerned.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the average time that patients wait for the results of cervical smear tests in each health board area.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 11 February 1994 at columns *417-18*, and the replies that I gave the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), *Official Report*, 21 January, column *759*, 3 February, column *929*, and 4 February, column *962*.

School Meals

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children received free school meals in each year since 1990; how the rules governing eligibility to free school meals have been amended over that period; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested, taken from annual school meals census returns, is as follows:

Pupils receiving free school meals

	Numbers
1990	99,303
1991	101,915
1992	107,186
1993	107,709

There have been no changes in the entitlement to free meals since 1990.

Urology Services

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average waiting time for urology services in each of Scotland's health board areas.

Mr. Stewart: The information is shown in the table:

Area of Residence	*Wait (in days) for First Attendance at Consultant Outpatient Clinic*[1]		*Wait (in days) for 'booked' Inpatient or Day Case Treatment*[5]			
			Inpatients		*Day Cases*	
	Mean	*Median*[2]	*Mean*	*Median*[2]	*Mean*	*Median*[2]
Argyll and Clyde	84	78	92	53	73	49
Ayreshire and Arran	46	32	73	39	84	73
Borders	39	29	92	37	159	66
Dumfries and Galloway	59	50	49	38	41	34
Fife	57	51	92	35	82	47
Forth Valley	49	38	64	34	35	24
Grampian	73	54	44	36	36	30
Greater Glasgow	74	68	82	38	58	38
Highland	85	98	76	40	11	14
Lanarkshire	81	55	92	55	62	48
Lothian	47	42	134	50	131	61
Orkney	[4]—	[4]—	24	21	[4]—	[4]—
Shetland	29	29	11	6	[4]—	[4]—
Tayside	77	72	59	42	60	33
Western Isles	50	26	33	22	[4]—	[4]—
Scotland[3]	66	56	86	42	69	39

[1]Includes patients who did not attend their outpatient appointment.
[2]The number of days within which 50 per cent. of patients had waited for treatment.
[3]Includes patients resident outwith Scotland and cases where the patient's address was not recorded.
[4]In areas where there is no specialist in urology some patients requiring urological treatment may be treated within the specialty of general surgery.
[5]Provisional information.
All information relates to the three months ending 31 December 1993.

Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scotland's housing stock is constructed or adapted to meet the needs of physically disabled people at the latest date for which information is available; if he will break this information down into categories of housing tenure; what plans he has to enhance the availability of such housing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 31 March 1993, there were 23,184 public authority and housing association dwellings built or adapted for physically disabled people, 2·6 per cent. of the public sector stock. Information on private sector provision is not available centrally.

The draft housing and community care circular, issued for comment in February, restates the Government's guidelines on housing for physically disabled people. A letter seeking views on the topics to be covered in a consultation paper on the extension of access requirements in the building regulations to new dwellings has recently been issued to outside bodies.

Slingshots and Catapults

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation to ban the sale of slingshots and catapults; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce legislation to ban the sale of slingshots and catapults. The sale of a range of dangerous items which have no apparent legitimate use is already banned under the Offensive Weapons Order 1988. Catapults are sold for legitimate use by anglers and farmers.

Health Service, Central Legal Office

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish Laurence Peterken's review of the Scottish health service central legal office;

(2) what was the remit of Laurence Peterken's review of the Scottish health service central legal office; and what investigations he has carried out.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* Mr. Laurence Peterken has been appointed as special projects director reporting to the chief executive of the management executive. His remit is to undertake an organisational and functional review of the divisions which comprise the Common Services Agency. In reviewing the central legal office his fact-finding included interviews with NHS trusts, boards, private solicitors, and senior management of the CSA and CLO. His findings and recommendations in respect of the central legal office have been reported to the chief executive.

Any decision on the future of the central legal office will be a matter for my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State. It is not the practice to publish advice given to Ministers.

Nursing Homes, Lanarkshire

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many staff are employed in the inspection of private nursing homes in the Lanarkshire health board area;

(2) how many licensed private nursing homes there are in the Lanarkshire health board area;

(3) on how many occasions each of the licensed private nursing homes in the Lanarkshire health board area has been inspected since it was opened.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 21 June 1994]:* An assistant chief area nursing officer is employed exclusively on nursing home inspection duties and has access to a full administrative service and other medical, pharmaceutical and additional specialist nursing input, as required.

There are 50 registered nursing homes within the Lanarkshire health board area, all of which are inspected at least twice annually.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the effect on the council tax's single person discount when responsibility for water and sewerage charges is taken away from local government under the Government's proposals.

Sir Hector Monro: The restructuring of water and sewerage services will not affect the availability of council tax discount for single adult households.

HEALTH

Appointments

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of *(a)* chairmen, *(b)* chief executives and *(c)* board members of (i) regional health authorities, (ii) district health authorities and (iii) NHS trusts are women.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest information available centrally is given in the table.

Chairman and non-executive appointees

	Number of women appointed	*Women as a percentage of total appointees*
Regional health authorities		
Chairmen	1	12·5
Non-executive members	19	47·5
District health authorities		
Chairmen	26	24·1
Non-executive members	228	38·4
NHS Trusts		
Chairmen	104	26·0
Non-executive directors	795	40·4

Information about the number of female chief executives employed is not available centrally.

London Implementation Group

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the NHS budget for the area covered by the London Implementation Group for *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93, *(c)* 1993-94 and *(d)* 1994-95.

Mr. Sackville: Residents of London benefit from spending from the total national health service budget by the Department of Health, regional health authorities, district health authorities and family health services authorities. It is not possible to apportion Department of Health and regional health authority spending geographically and consequently it is not possible to give a figure for the NHS budget for this area.

NHS Budget

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the NHS budget for England in *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93, *(c)* 1993-94 and *(d)* 1994-95.

Mr. Sackville: Gross national health service spending for England is shown in the table for the years requested.

	£ million
1991-92	26,809
1992-93	29,387
[1]1993-94	30,520
[2]1994-95	31,970

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Current provision.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will introduce a system of performance management for mental health review tribunals, including

a mechanism for the feedback to tribunal members concerning the outcome for patients they have discharged from their sections under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Bowis: The work of mental health review tribunal members in England is monitored by the eight regional chairmen of the tribunals. This was described in the tribunal's annual report for 1993, a copy of which is available in the Library. Regional chairmen have agreed that it would be useful for members to know more about the outcome for patients whom they discharge and the Department is commissioning research into this and into decision making by tribunals.

Health Campaigns

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of staff employed, and number of inquiries received, in connection with her Department's campaign on *(a)* "Keep Warm, Keep Well" and *(b)* Health Service and Professional Recruitment.

Mr. Sackville: Four departmental staff are responsible for the "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign, among their wider duties, including its policy and publicity aspects. There were 31,775 requests for the 1993-94 information booklet. A "winter warmth" freephone helpline is run on the Department's behalf by the Help the Aged and is manned by 5·94 staff—whole time equivalent. The helpline received 24,574 inquiries in the period 14 October 1993 to 31 March 1994.

During 1993 the health service's professions recruitment campaign generated 11,538 requests for information. A nursing officer co-ordinates the campaign drawing on advice from departmental colleagues as required.

"Making London Better"

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff are employed in the clearing house referred to in paragraph 4.46 of the departmental report to assist staff displaced as a result of the changes brought about by "Making London Better"; what is the total budget of the clearing house; and how many requests for assistance it has received.

Dr. Mawhinney: The clearing house employs five staff and the total budget for 1994-95 is £212,000. To date the clearing house has received 425 requests for assistance from individuals displaced as a result of service changes in London. Additionally, the clearing house deals with an estimated 70 inquiries per day relating to the clearing house scheme.

Obstetric Cholestasis

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the number of still births that arise as a result of the condition known as obstetric cholestasis both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Mr. Sackville: Between 1986 and 1992 there were no cases of stillbirths registered in England and Wales with obstetric cholestasis or intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy mentioned as a cause on the certificate.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and Learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The causes of stillbirths are not collected centrally by the World Health Organisation. Individual countries abroad will need to be consulted for information about stillbirths attributed to ICP.

Disabled People (Employment)

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the level of compliance of each health authority in England and Wales with the requirements of the statutory quota scheme for the employment of disabled persons.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest figures were published in the April 1993 *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Clinical Standards

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information sources are currently available to purchasers to enable them to assess clinical effectiveness.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are various sources of information on clinical effectiveness currently available, including "Effective Health Care" bulletins, high quality clinical guidelines, the health outcomes clearing house, the Cochrane database and the results of clinical audit. Copies of the bulletins and guidelines are available in the Library.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available on the clinical performance and effectiveness of different treatment centres in relation to paediatric cardiac surgery.

Mr. Sackville: The information currently available centrally is from routinely collected data such as the annual hospital episode statistics prepared by the Government Statistical Service, copies of which are available in the Library. The Department is considering a recently received application for funding of a pilot study for clinical audit of paediatric and adult surgical procedures in cardiothoracic centres.

General Practitioners (Suicides)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners committed suicide in *(a)* 1973, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available centrally.

Clinical Effectiveness

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will identify those elements of the NHS executive dataset health service indicators which relate to measurement of clinical effectiveness.

Dr. Mawhinney: The health service indicators dataset contains over 500 indicators covering a wide range of national health service activities. Many of the indicators are related to clinical effectiveness, for example, indicators relating to "The Health of the Nation", outcomes, mortality and hospital activity can be used in conjunction

with other relevant sources of information to examine the question of clinical effectiveness. Copies of the health service indicators are available in the Library.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available on the clinical performance and effectiveness of different treatment centres in relation to the most common cancers.

Mr. Sackville: In contracting for cancer services health authorities will wish to assess the performance of hospitals and other providers of cancer services. Comparative data are not available centrally.

The recently published consultative document entitled "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services" recommends that cancer registration and careful monitoring of treatment and outcomes is essential. Copies of the document will be placed in the Library.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measurements currently exist to audit the clinical performance of GPs; how these are implemented and with what consequences; and what further measures are proposed.

Dr. Mawhinney: As independent practitioners, general practitioners review their own performance through the process of clinical audit. Our view is that audit priorities are best determined locally by individual GP practices, in the light of local requirements. To assist this, we have made funds available through family health services authorities in each year since 1991 to enable all practices to participate in clinical audit.

Public Bodies

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members there are of *(a)* special health authorities, *(b)* trusts boards, *(c)* district health authorities, *(d)* family health service authorities and *(e)* regional health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

	Chairman	*Non-executives*
Special health authorities	11	179
National health service trusts	419	2,057
District health authorities	112	560
Family health services authorities	90	810
Regional health authorities	8	40

Care Charges

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued on charging users or their carers for *(a)* domiciliary care, *(b)* day care, or *(c)* respite care provided by local authorities.

Mr. Bowis: Guidance about charging for non-residential social services for adults—LAC(94)1—was sent to local social services authorities in January. A further more detailed advice note was subsequently issued.

The Department has also issued the "Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide".

Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Children's Homes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* children's homes and *(b)* inspectors of children's homes there are in (i) Wales, (ii) Scotland, (iii) England, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) the United Kingdom as a whole; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The number of children's homes in each country is shown in table *(a)*. The total for the United Kingdom is not given because the available figures relate to different years.

The number of inspectors of children's homes is not routinely collected centrally. However, the total number of inspectors in each country in 1992-93 is shown in table *(b)*. They do not all have specific responsibilities for the inspection of children's homes.

Table (a) Number of children's homes

	Local Authority	*Voluntary*	*Private*	*Total*
(i) Wales[1]	53	5	n/a	58
(ii) Scotland[2]	116	37	n/a	153
(iii) England[3]	950	170	180	1,300
(iv) Northern Ireland[4]	21	13	n/a	34

[1] From "Activities of Social Services Departments: Year ended 31 March 1992" published by the Welsh Office. The number of private homes is not available.
[2] From Statistical Bulletins SWK/SC/1994/1 "Services for Children 1991 and 1992" published by the Scottish Office. Figures relate to 1 992, the number of voluntary homes includes private homes.
[3] From "Choosing with Care" (The Warner Report) published by the Department of Health. Figures relate to 1992.
[4] Unpublished data from Health and Social Service Boards at 31 March 1993.

Table (b) Total number of inspectors

	Local Authority	*SSI*
(i) Wales	n/a	8
(ii) Scotland	84	20
(iii) England[1]	1,139	98
(iv) Northern Ireland	n/a	n/a

[1] Figures for local authority inspectors in England relate to staff in 106 local authorities out of 109 which responded to a survey for "Raising the Standard"—the second annual report of the Chief Inspector, Social Services Inspectorate. The figure for the Social Service Inspectorate (SSI) is also taken from this report.

Residential Homes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* registered nursing homes and *(b)* inspectors of registered nursing homes there are in (i) Wales, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Northern Ireland, (iv) England and (v) the United Kingdom as a whole; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: On 31 March 1993 there were:
380 registered nursing homes in Wales;
437 in Scotland
245 in Northern Ireland; and
5,190 in England; This gives a total of

6,252 in the United Kingdom as a whole.

The figures for Scotland and England include all institutions registered under the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938 and the Registered Homes Act 1984 respectively. This includes private hospitals as well as nursing homes.

There are no centrally available figures for the numbers of nursing home inspectors for England and Scotland but there were 17 in Wales and 21·5—whole-time equivalents—in Northern Ireland on 31 March 1993.

Prostheses

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all hip prostheses currently purchased by the NHS together with their (i) volume and (ii) value for each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of full-time equivalent staff employed in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1993 in each health authority in England.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information for 1989 will be placed in the Library. The information for 1993 is not yet available.

Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding her Department provides for research into Creutzfeldt Jakob disease; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department and the Scottish Office fund research carried out at the United Kingdom Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance centre in Edinburgh. The unit will receive a total of £179,000 from the Department of Health in the current financial year.

Dentistry

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children aged under 16 years are registered with a dentist in each family health service authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will restore free dental examinations for all patients;

(2) what plans she has to raise the proportion of dental treatment costs paid by patients.

Dr. Mawhinney: The level of patient charges is always kept under review.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the amount which will be raised by dental charges in the current year; what amount is raised from dental check-ups; and how much would be raised by increasing to 100 per cent. the proportion of charges paid by patients.

Dr. Mawhinney: The 1994 estimates anticipate income from patient charges in the general dental services in England at £398 million, net of refunds. We estimate that about £60 million of this total will be derived from charges for dental examinations. Assuming no change in the volume of national health service dental treatment or the curent maximum charge level, raising the proportional charge to 100 per cent. would raise between £90 and £100 million in additional charge income in a full year, at current prices.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost to the patient of a course of dental treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: We estimate that the average cost to a patient who paid the full national health service charge was £19·78, and to a patient who received partial remission from NHS charges £14·10.

Administration Budgets

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *380*, regarding NHS budgets, if she will detail on what the total administrative budget, excluding staffing costs, was expended in each year since 1989.

Mr. Sackville: The Department's administrative budget, excluding staff, covers a wide range of essential costs, including buildings—rent, maintenance, fuel and utilities, security, cleaning and other office services; meetings of expert advisory committees and working groups, conferences, seminars and publications; payments to other Government Departments, for example, to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for collection of statistics; consultancy, and staff training and travel.

Abortion

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 24 May, *Official Report*, column *126*, regarding legal abortions in respect of women living in the Channel Islands, how many women have had legal abortions otherwise than in England in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: In 1990, 1991 and 1992 there is no record of legal abortions in either Scotland or Wales to women usually resident in the Channel Islands.

Health Authorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she plans to introduce legislation to merge district health authorities and family health service authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: We intend to introduce legislation to enable the merger of district health authorities and family health services authorities as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she plans to introduce legislation to abolish regional health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 March at column *416*.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research she has undertaken into the effectiveness of the drug Beta Interferon in treating multiple sclerosis.

Mr. Bowis: The Department is currently discussing this matter with interested parties, including the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

NHS Internal Market

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase the degree of private sector involvement as providers of services in the national health service internal market.

Mr. Sackville: The extent to which national health service purchasers contract with the private sector is a matter for local decision. National health service purchasers are expected to purchase healthcare as efficiently and effectively as possible—from the public or private sector—to ensure good quality and best value for money.

Hospital Performance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that league tables measuring comparative hospital performance are weighted to take account of the make-up of the local communities which they serve.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Functions Analysis Groups

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she received the reports of the functions analysis groups; and if she will place copies of them in the Library.

Dr. Mawhinney: Final reports from the 12 functions groups were received on 31 March. A summary of the groups' findings will be made available in due course.

Hospital Performance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to publish her Department's guide to hospital performance.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 24 May at column *121*.

Liposuction Surgery

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received alleging negligence during liposuction surgery.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 18 May 1994, c. 517]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

"None. Complaints of medical negligence are the responsibility of health authorities and trusts who are liable by law for the negligence of their staff in the course of their national health service employment."

TRANSPORT

Rail Salaries

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now list the salaries for 1994-95 for *(a)* the chairman of British Rail and *(b)* the chairman of Railtrack; and if he will express the salaries as a percentage of the 1993-94 salaries.

Mr. Freeman: Their 1994-95 salary rates have not yet been determined.

Roadworthiness Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by location the roadside checks carried out by the Vehicle Inspectorate in the last financial year and the number of vehicles checked; and if he will list the number of immediate prohibitions, delayed prohibitions and defect notices issued at each roadside check.

Mr. Key: The table gives a breakdown by region. It is not practical to give a breakdown by location.

Region	*Vehicles and trailers examined*	*Immediate prohibitions*	*Delayed prohibitions*	*Defect notices*
North East	28,763	1,951	1,657	3,527
North West	38,264	2,197	2,021	8,622
West Midlands	25,499	1,107	1,019	899
East	29,506	1,932	1,781	3,315
South Wales	13,994	676	998	524
South West	28,283	1,776	1,857	1,942
South East	25,292	1,214	1,479	2,695
Scotland	29,047	1,885	1,726	797

Small Bus Permits

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many spot checks were carried out by the Vehicle Inspectorate on operators of minibuses covered by small bus permits in each of the last five years.

Mr. Key: This information is not available.

Vehicle Registration Office

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report,* column *83,* what account was taken in the vehicle registration office review of the needs of disabled people.

Mr. Key: The review of DVLA's vehicle registration office network took account of the interests and requirements of all the networks' customers including disabled people. Their specific interests were presented to the review team by the representative of the Council for the Disabled.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report,* column *80,* if he will update the estimated cost to date of the review of the vehicle registration office and the budget set aside for the review.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Tuesday 14 June 1994, at column *520.*

DVLA Management Structure

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *4*, how DVLA's senior structure was reviewed and revised in order further to improve the management of the organisation; if he will list the improvements resulting from the changes; and what was the cost of reviewing and revising the structure.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 3 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *468*. The agency's senior structure was reorganised into functional groups responsible for operations, strategic planning and development, and support services. The new structure is more focused, has sharpened decision making and reduced costs. The fees and expenses paid to Price Waterhouse were the only significant direct cost of the review.

Highways Agency

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost to the Department of providing hospitality for those civil servants moving to the Highways Agency on 30 April.

Mr. Key: The launch of the Highways Agency was marked by modest functions for about 2,560 staff in London and the regions at a total cost of approximately £7,000. The functions catered for staff who joined the agency on 1 April and those who transferred to the new Government regional offices.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *390*, if he will supply similar information on prohibition notices for heavy goods vehicles in 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The table categorises prohibitions issued by defect.

Defect category	*Number of time occurred*
Seat belts	15
Smoke emission	841
Road wheels and hubs	2,195
Size and type of tyres	147
Condition of tyres	4,982
Bumper bars	253
Spare wheel/carrier	20
Vehicle/trailer coupling	333
Trailer emergency brake	53
Trailer landing legs	11
Wings and wheel arches	349
Cab security	116
Cab doors	53
Cab floor and steps	163
Driving seat	75
Security of body	299
Condition of body	470
Mirrors	92
View to front	90
Glass or other transparent material	191
Windscreen wipers and washers	240
Speedometer	1
Audible warning	40
Driving controls	143
Tachograph	35
Play at steering wheel	79
Steering wheel	38
Steering column	146
Brake pressure/vacuum warning	41
Build up of pressure/vacuum	102
Lever operating mechanical brakes	128
Service brake pedal	45
Service brake operation	164
Hand operated brake control valves	156
Condition of chassis	751
Electrical wiring and equipment	181
Engine and transmission mountings	56
Oil leaks	2,864
Fuel tanks and systems	1,379
Exhaust systems	972
Suspension pins and bushes	1,246
Suspension spring units and linkages	2,154
Attachment of sprint units, linkages and sub-frames	2,158
Shock absorbers	219
Axles, stub axles and wheel bearings	293
Steering linkage	1,669
Steering gear	289
Power steering	412
Transmission	841
Mechanical brake components	1,715
Brake actuators	2,734
Braking systems and components	6,046
Rear markings	20
Front position lamps	445
Rear position lamps	908
Reflectors	99
Direction indicators	776
Aim of headlamps	437
Headlamps	1,165
Stop lamps	1,486
Trailer parking brake	405
Service brake performance	2,644
Secondary brake performance	1,105
Parking brake performance	1,570

Transport Research Laboratory

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *3*, regarding the appointment of a temporary financial director in the Transport Research Laboratory, who took the decision to make the appointment.

Mr. Key: In line with the terms of the framework document for the Transport Research Laboratory the decision to appoint a temporary financial director was made by the principal establishment and finance officer of the Department, in consultation with the chief executive of the Transport Research Laboratory.

Spofforth Bypass

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was North Yorkshire county council's estimate for building the Spofforth bypass in 1988; and what has been their subsequent estimates for each of the last six years.

Mr. Key: North Yorkshire county council first submitted an estimate for Spofforth bypass to my Department in 1988 for the financial year 1989-90. This was for the sum of £1·199 million. Subsequent estimates are as follows:

	£ million
1990-91	1·920
1991-92	2·035
1992-93	1·976
1993-94	3·394
1994-95	3·220

Coach Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column 596, if he will make it his policy to make an assessment of the safety benefits of anti-crush zones in place of rear seats of coaches.

Mr. Key: No.

Road Pricing Schemes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has sought evidence from Spain as to the effects of road pricing schemes.

Mr. Key: The Green Paper, "Paying for Better Motorways", Cm 2200, reviewed the experience of tolling in a number of countries, including Spain. We found no cases which would provide a reliable indication of the likely effects of tolling in this country. In Spain, tolled roads were planned and constructed as such, and average toll levels are around 10p per mile for cars, well in excess of the highest illustrative figure of 1·5p per mile quoted in the Green Paper for tolling the existing motorway network in Great Britain.

Marine Safety

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the results of the survey on port reception facilities by the Marine Safety Agency will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The survey on port reception facilities being undertaken by the Marine Safety Agency is in two parts; a survey questionnaire and an independent research project to assess the quality of the facilities provided. The results of the research project will be published when it is completed in September 1994.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what proportion of ships entering United Kingdom ports request the use of oily waste reception facilities and other reception facilities; and how many, and what proportion, actually use them.

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency does not maintain statistics of the number of ships requesting and using oily waste and other reception facilities at United Kingdom ports and this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The research currently being undertaken to assess the quality of facilities provided in United Kingdom ports will, however, identify whether any specific restrictions are placed on the use of the facilities provided. Results of the research project will be published when it is completed in September 1994.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the charges imposed by each port for the use of oily waste reception facilities.

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency is currently undertaking a comprehensive survey to assess the quality of reception facilities provided in United Kingdom ports. The survey will indicate the level of charges for the use of oily waste reception facilities and the extent to which they are integrated into harbour fees. Consideration will be given as to what useful information might be published when the results of the survey have been evaluated.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ports which require pre-sorting of waste before ships can use oily waste reception facilities.

Mr. Norris: The nature of oily waste reception facilities is such that pre-sorting is not necessary.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has done of the cost-effectiveness for potential users of port waste facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Department commissioned research into the provision of reception facilities in United Kingdom ports in September 1991. This survey on oily waste and garbage reception facilities, undertaken by Liverpool university, concluded that at the ports visited facilities existed or could be made available to meet the requirements of MARPOL. There was no evidence of a policy of overcharging, but the arrangements for small amounts of garbage were not considered adequate. The research currently being undertaken by the Marine Safety Agency into port reception facilities will provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Scotch Whisky

3. **Dr. Hampson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact the recent GATT agreement will have on the Scotch whisky industry.

Mr. Soames: I am delighted that exports of Scotch whisky are at record levels.

The tariff cuts we obtained in the GATT agreement will help the industry to build on this fine achievement.

Agricultural Tenancies

9. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions she has had with the National Farmers Union regarding changes in agricultural tenancies.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend has frequent contact with the National Farmers Union on various matters. I am pleased to say that we are in complete agreement on the need for reform of agricultural tenancy law.

Common Agricultural Policy

14. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the effect of enlargement of the European Community on the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jack: Accession by Austria, Sweden, Finland and Norway is unlikely to have major implications for the CAP.

But the further enlargement of the Union to include the countries of central and eastern Europe would, I believe, require fundamental changes to the present CAP.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals she has for further reform of the CAP.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am pressing for further reforms to the common agricultural policy, both in the beef sector and in those sectors not reformed in 1992, particularly sugar, wine, olive oil and fruit and vegetables.

Reform is necessary to reduce costs and to bring these sectors closer to the market.

In the longer term, I shall press for support prices to be further reduced so as to bring supply and demand into better balance and so make supply controls, such as quotas and set-aside, redundant.

Horticulture Industry

15. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps can be taken to strengthen the horticulture industry.

Mr. Jack: Our best growers set the example by responding to the needs of the market and focusing on quality, price, service and attention to detail.

Whales

16. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement about the latest developments at the International Whaling Commission.

Mr. Jack: The satisfactory outcome of the latest IWC meeting in Mexico, including the establishment of the southern ocean whale sanctuary, is detailed in my reply of 15 June, c. *575-77.*

19. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the conflicting evidence presented at the international whaling conference in Mexico of the number of blue whales *(a)* in the northern hemisphere and *(b)* in the southern hemisphere; and what action she is taking to urge the international community to protect the species.

Mr. Jack: I am not aware of any conflicting evidence on the current number of blue whales which was presented to this year's IWC. Abundance estimate of whales are primarily based on sighting surveys, and surveys are in hand to provide revised estimates of blue whale numbers throughout their range. Blue whales remain fully protected.

Animal Health

17. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the adequacy of animal health controls.

Mr. Soames: We take the threat of animal disease very seriously and constantly reassess the adequacy of our animal health controls.

We are not complacent and have taken those steps we consider necessary to safeguard our high animal health status.

Bacon

18. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives she has taken to promote British bacon.

Mr. Jack: The Meat and Livestock Commission has prime responsibility for promotion of British bacon, but the Ministry also plays a part through its pig assurance scheme which provides the farm assurance element of the British charter quality bacon scheme.

Food Production

20. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she last met the Food and Drink Federation to discuss the importance of food production to the United Kingdom economy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My ministerial colleagues and I have frequent discussions with the federation on topics of concern to an industry which makes such a valuable contribution to the United Kingdom economy.

Fisheries Council

21. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what matters were discussed at the last EC Fisheries Council; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 14 June, *Official Report,* columns *441-43,* on the outcome of the 10 June Council of Fisheries Ministers.

Milk Marque

22. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has had in the last month on the future of Milk Marque.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I and my Department have received various representations. I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales approved the milk marketing board's reorganisation scheme, and modifications on 16 June.

Animal Transportation

23. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps she is taking to improve conditions for the transport of animals.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received to press for the limitation of journeys for live animals to eight hours; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones).

EC Agricultural Expenditure

24. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest estimate for EC spending on agriculture in 1995; and if she will express the total as a sum per day in pound sterling.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the 1995 EC preliminary draft budget, CAP expenditure has been set at the level of the agriculture guideline of 36,994 mecu, £28,477 million.

This equates to £78 million per day.

Agriculture Promotion

25. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps she is taking to ensure that British agriculture is widely promoted.

Mr. Jack: The Ministry devotes considerable effort to the support and promotion of the agricultural industry, as the departmental report, a copy of which is deposited in the Library, and our regular news releases, make clear. We support Food From Britain to the tune of £5 million per annum and provide the statutory framework for the Meat and Livestock Commission and other industry bodies which carry out promotional work. We have launched the continental challenge this year to help United Kingdom suppliers find markets with European retailers. MAFF Ministers are making promotional visits this year to Brazil, Colombia, the Czech Republic, India, Poland, the Slovak Republic and the USA. Our new marketing development scheme, launched on 15 June, could be used to help set up new promotional initiatives.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

26. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ADAS consultancy posts are to be cut during 1994-95.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This is a matter delegated to ADAS under its framework document.

I am informed by the chief executive of ADAS that in order to achieve 63 per cent. of cost recovery for chargeable advisory services in 1994-95, ADAS expects to need to shed some 325 posts, found in approximately equal numbers from among administrative and consultancy positions.

Of the 160 consultancy staff posts to be cut, ADAS expects 75 staff to be made compulsorily redundant at the end of June, following a voluntary early retirement and severance scheme.

Fishing Rights

27. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what she is doing to preserve British fishing rights.

Mr. Jack: The common fisheries policy, which was established in 1983, took good account of United Kingdom interests in all the major stocks around our shores. We also, at that time, reduced the access rights of other member states in our coastal waters by nearly three quarters. Since then, the Government have continued to protect British fishing interests. More recently, the United Kingdom has led the successful opposition to the European Commission's "blank cheque" proposals for future access by Spanish and Portuguese fishing vessels to the waters of other member states, and we ensured that detailed rules must be drawn up within a tight framework of safeguards which have been agreed by the Council. These rules protect our quota shares and require that there shall be no increase in fishing effort in areas subject to the Spanish and Portuguese accession treaty. For other areas, including the North sea, any proposals for access would have to be for non-quota species only and take account of track record. The outcome of the negotiations on Norwegian accession to the common fisheries policy also protects the interests of British fishermen, with relative stability assured and no reduction in United Kingdom fishing opportunities. Indeed, we have increased fishing possibilities for cod at North Norway.

Fisheries

28. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the effect of enlargement of the EU on the British fishing industry.

Mr. Jack: In my reply of 22 March to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), *Official Report*, columns *120-22*. I set out the fisheries implications for the United Kingdom and the other member states of the European Union, of Norwegian Accession. Swedish quotas in the North sea will be consolidated at the average for the period 1989 to 1993, while the arrangements for Swedish and Finnish market access will be the same as for Norway.

Protected Birds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list, by estate, those occasions on which birds belonging to protected species have been found *(a)* shot, *(b)* poisoned or *(c)* otherwise illegally killed in each of the past five years; and how many (i) prosecutions and (ii) convictions have resulted.

Mr. Soames: Cases reported to this Ministry of protected birds killed by poisoning are given in the table on a county basis as details of the estates on which poisoned birds have been found are not readily available. The location where a poisoned bird is found is not necessarily the same place as where it consumed the poison. This Ministry does not collect information on protected bird species that have been illegally shot or otherwise illegally killed.

Information held centrally by the Home Office on prosecutions and convictions for illegal activities cannot separately identify the killing of protected birds from other illegal activities against them because the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 does not separately identify an offence of killing wild birds from the offence of injuring or taking them.

Details of illegal poisoning incidents reported to MAFF involving protected bird species from 1989-93

County	*Year*	*Number and species involved*
Avon	1991	1 buzzard
	1992	1 crow
Bedfordshire	1993	1 red kite
Buckinghamshire	1992	10 feral pigeons
Cambridge	1989	2 chaffinches
	1990	1 buzzard
	1991	1 crow
	1993	Several rooks
Cheshire	1992	4 magpies
	1993	Numerous crows and magpies
		1 crow, 2 jackdaws, 4 magpies
Cornwall	1990	3 buzzards
	1991	1 red kite
	1992	1 buzzard, 1 gull, several crows

County	Year	Number and species involved
Cumbria	1989	2 buzzards
		1 buzzard
		1 buzzard, 2 crows
		2 buzzards, several crows
	1990	2 buzzards
		1 buzzard
		2 buzzards
		1 crow
		1 crow
	1991	2 buzzards
		1 buzzard
	1992	1 buzzard
		1 buzzard, several crows
		1 buzzard
	1993	1 rook
Derbyshire	1989	1 kestrel
		1 goshawk
	1990	1 sparrowhawk
Devon	1989	1 buzzard
	1990	8 feral pigeons
	1991	1 buzzard
	1992	2 peregrines
	1993	1 buzzard
Dorset	1989	1 buzzard
	1992	2 buzzards, 1 peregrine
Durham	1993	1 buzzard
East Sussex	1989	46 feral pigeons, 2 black-headed gulls
		3 crows
	1990	Several feral pigeons
	1993	Several feral pigeons
Essex	1990	8 black-headed gulls
	1993	2 magpies
		1 magpie
Greater London	1993	20–30 feral pigeons
		60 feral pigeons
Hampshire	1989	1 buzzard
	1993	1 little owl
Hereford and Worcester	1989	c. 300 mallard and pheasants
		1 red kite
	1990	1 sparrowhawk
		1 buzzard
		1 buzzard
		Several pheasants
		19 crows, 1 jackdaw, 1 pheasant, 1 woodpigeon, 2 greenfinch
	1991	11 pheasants, 3 jays, many woodpigeon
		2 crows
		1 buzzard
		Several house sparrows
Humberside	1990	17 rooks
	1992	8 rooks, 9 feral pigeons
	1993	12 mallard
Kent	1990	Blackbirds, robins and starlings
	1991	2 rooks, 1 magpie
		1 kestrel
Lancashire	1989	2 magpies
	1990	1 hen harrier
		1 kestrel
	1991	1 red-tailed hawk (falconer's bird)
		1 magpie, 1 rook
	1992	48 rooks, 1 pheasant
	1993	1 buzzard, 1 rook
Lincolnshire	1989	1 tawny owl, 1 crow
		4 blackbirds, 4 house sparrows
	1990	1 crow, 1 rook, 5 magpies
	1991	2 magpies
		More than 25 feral pigeons
		20 gulls
	1992	91 brent geese, 1 pheasant
Norfolk	1989	Several house sparrows, feral pigeons and blackbird
	1991	20+ feral pigeons
	1992	c. 30 pheasants, 1 robin
		Several feral pigeons, 1 robin
	1993	1 hen harrier
Northumberland	1992	9 rooks, 1 crow, 1 magpie, 1 chaffinch
		1 goshawk
North Yorkshire	1989	18 mallard, 1 moorhen
		1 crow
	1990	2 crows
		3 rooks
	1991	1 hen harrier
		1 rook
	1992	2 kestrels, several crows
	1993	4 feral pigeon, 1 woodpigeon, 1 rook, 2 jackdaws, 1 yellowhammer
Nottinghamshire	1990	1 sparrowhawk
		30 pheasants
	1992	1 buzzard
	1993	5 magpies, 1 crow
Oxfordshire	1990	1 red kite
	1993	1 sparrowhawk
Shropshire	1989	1 buzzard
		Several feral pigeons, 1 blackbird
		Several crows, jackdaws and rooks
		Several rooks
	1990	2 buzzard
		1 buzzard
		Several rooks and woodpigeon
		2 crows
		1 magpie
	1991	1 magpie
		Numerous rooks and jackdaws
		Numerous magpies and 2 jackdaws
	1992	1 magpie
South Yorkshire	1990	3 kestrels, 1 sparrowhawk
Staffordshire	1991	1 magpie
		Several starlings
	1992	1 buzzard
Somerset	1989	1 buzzard
	1991	2 buzzards
Suffolk	1989	1 sparrowhawk
	1990	4 mallard
Surrey	1991	1 magpie
Tyne and Wear	1989	Several gulls and crows
	1991	Several house sparrows
	1993	Many house sparrows, blackbirds, starlings
Warwickshire	1990	2 buzzards
		1 jackdaw, 3 rooks
	1991	1 buzzard, 1 crow
West Midlands	1992	1 buzzard
West Sussex	1992	1 magpie

County	Year	Number and species involved
West Yorkshire	1991	1 magpie
Wiltshire	1990	1 buzzard
	1991	1 buzzard
	1993	2 buzzards

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the representations she has received over the last 18 months on the subject of the proposed reform in agricultural tenancy law were in favour of a statutory minimum period; how many were in favour of complete contractual freedom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Since 1 January 1993, my right hon. Friend has received 187 representations via hon. Members and 26 addressed to her direct. Of these the vast majority were broadly supportive of the Government's proposals, with only 23 favouring a statutory minimum term. We are keen to introduce legislation as soon as parliamentary time is available.

Horses (Exports)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to change the minimum values for horses being exported abroad.

Mr. Soames: The Animal Health Act 1981, and orders made under the Act, require a minimum valuation to be provided for certain categories of equines before a welfare export licence is issued. There are exemptions for thoroughbred horses certified by the Jockey Club and other horses intended for breeding, riding, exhibition, jumping and polo are also exempted. I have no plans to change these arrangements.

Rabies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions for breaches of the Rabies Order 1974, as amended, there were in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The number of prosecutions in Great Britain for breaches of the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974, as amended, in the last three years is as follows:

	Number
1991	64
1992	45
1993	24

These figures are compiled from the returns given to the Department by local authorities, which are responsible for enforcing the order.

EMPLOYMENT

Acquired Rights Directive

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the legal and consequential costs involved in the various proceedings initiated against the United Kingdom by the EC Commission in relation to the application of the acquired rights directive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The disbursements incurred on behalf of the United Kingdom in connection with the proceedings in the European Court of Justice concerning the acquired rights directive—case C-382/92—and the collective redundancies directive—case C-383-92—were about £9,200. This consists of counsel's fees, VAT, travelling and hotel accommodation. This figure does not include the costs of staff in the Treasury Solicitor's Department or the Employment Department's legal advisers who provided legal services and advised within the normal course of their duties. No assessment has been made of any wider legal or consequential costs.

Labour Statistics

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged between 55 and 65 years are currently in paid full-time employment.

Miss Widdecombe: Latest estimates from the winter 1993-94 labour force survey for Great Britain show that 50 per cent. of males and 15 per cent. of females aged 55 to 64 worked full-time as employees or self-employed.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest information he has on levels of economic inactivity in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas; and what were the comparable figures *(a)* 12 months and *(b)* 24 months ago.

Miss Widdecombe: The available estimates from the labour force survey of economic inactivity levels refer to the Doncaster local authority district area, and are given in the following table. No information from the LFS for local authority districts available prior to spring 1992.

Number of Economically Inactive Persons in Doncaster:

Quarter	Economically Inactive Persons
Spring 1992	97,000
Winter 1992-93	97,000
Winter 1993-94	97,000

[1] Persons not employed or unemployed according to the International Labour Organisation definitions.
Source: Labour Force Survey (not seasonally adjusted).

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for the Doncaster and Mexborough area the current number of *(a)* males and *(b)* females who are in receipt of unemployment benefit, and who have been unemployed for (i) longer than six months, (ii) longer than 12 months, (iii) longer than two years and (iv) three years and over.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the following table:

Unadjusted claimant unemployment by duration (April 1994)

Doncaster and Mexborough[1]	*Male*	*Female*
Over 6 months	14,642	3,015
Over 12 months	10,007	1,660
Over 2 years	5,977	927
Over 3 years	3,738	577

[1] Figures are totals for the Doncaster and the Rotherham and Mexborough travel-to-work areas combined.

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs have been created by the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* services industries since its inception.

Miss Widdecombe: Jobs are created by employers, and it is not possible to give a precise total for the numbers of cases where a training and enterprise council has assisted job creation in some way. The mission statement of Barnsley and Doncaster TEC is: "To work for local prosperity by creating through partnerships, a climate in our community were greater value is given to education, training and enterprise".

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to redraw the boundaries of the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I have no plans to redraw the boundaries of the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list those organisations which had contracts with the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC in 1993-94, but will not have a contract with the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC in 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: There is only one organisation which had a contract with Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council 1993-94 which does not have a contract with the TEC in 1994-95. This organisation is Barony college in Scotland. The reason for not contracting this year is because the trainee has now completed his training.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what regulations, codes of practice, and/or guidelines govern the party political activity of senior paid employees including chief executives and directors of the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC; how these differ from those which govern principal and chief officers of the local authorities: and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The training and enterprise council operating agreement precludes TECs from using any of their funds for party political purposes. TECs are private companies and it is for each TEC to decide what, if any, regulations should govern party political activity by senior paid employees. In addition, civil service staff who are seconded to TECs are subject to the same regulations as all other civil servants.

Fit-for-work Awards

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list each employer who has received a fit-for-work award in each of the past five years and the percentage of their work forces who were registered as disabled people at the time of the award.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The last fit-for-work awards were made in 1990. I have arranged for a list of the award winners in 1989 and 1990 to be placed in the Library.

Following consultation on the 1990 Document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", and advice from the National Advisory Council on Employment of people with disabilities, the then Secretary of State for Employment announced his decision to end the award scheme in 1991.

The percentage of registered disabled people employed by winners was not verified as part of the award process. These awards were intended to help promote positive policies in all aspects of the employment of disabled people, whether registered or not.

Health and Safety

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken to ensure that following the market testing of the distribution of Health and Safety Executive publications the Government have been successful in achieving their objectives of value for money.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following the change in the arrangements for the distribution of their publication in October 1993, the Health and Safety Executive is monitoring closely the performance of both contractors to ensure an effective and efficient service which provides value for money.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has now taken to evaluate the market testing of the distribution of Health and Safety Executive publications.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is too early to evaluate fully the market test of the distibution of Health and Safety Executive publications. The new arrangements became effective on 4 October 1993 for a three-year period. The HSE is monitoring closely the performance of both contractors. An interim evaluation will take place after the first full year of the new operation and a full evaluation will take place at the end of the second year.

Disabled People (Employment)

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of financial support is currently given by his Department to Remploy; and what the figure was in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Sir Harold Walker, dated 21 June 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding the level of financial support which is currently given to Remploy by the Employment Service and the figures for the past 15 years.

In the current financial year Remploy will be receiving a total of £92,082,000.

The figures for the past 15 years are as follows:

	£,000s
1979-80	31,008
1980-81	42,123
1981-82	45,684
1982-83	49,100
1983-84	51,903
1984-85	56,570
1985-86	59,290
1986-87	57,144
1987-88	57,996
1988-89	62,714
1989-90	67,013
1990-91	72,167
1991-92	75,346
1992-93	83,995
1993-94	89,199

I hope this is helpful.

Employment Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the total cost of the job creation programme in each year it was in existence; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(2) what was the total cost of the wider opportunities training programme in each year of its existence from 1985 to 1988; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(3) what was the total cost of the voluntary projects programme for each year of its existence from 1987 to 1988; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(4) what was the total cost of the job splitting scheme in each year it was in existence from 1983 to 1987; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(5) what was the total cost of the temporary employment subsidy for each year it was in existence, from 1975 to 1979; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(6) what was the total cost of the new job training scheme in each year of its existence from 1987 to 1988; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(7) what was the total cost of the job release scheme in each year it was in existence from 1977 to 1986; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(8) what was the total cost of the training for work programme for each year of its existence from 1993; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(9) what was the total cost of the old job training scheme in each year of its existence, from 1985 to 1988; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(10) what was the total cost of the job share programme in each year it was in existence from 1987 to 1991; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(11) what was the total cost of the short-term working compensation scheme for each year it was in existence, from 1978 to 1979; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of the years it was in existence;

(12) what was the total cost of the temporary short-time working compensation scheme for each year it was in existence from 1979 to 1984; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years.

Mr. David Hunt: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the total cost of the employment action programme in each year of its existence, from 1991 to 1993; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(2) what was the total cost of the community programme in each year of its existence, from 1982 to 1988; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years;

(3) what was the total cost of the employment training programme in each year of its existence, from 1988 to 1993; and how many individuals were assisted by the scheme in each of those years.

Mr. David Hunt: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Careers and Occupational Information Centre

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many officials have been suspended from duty as a result of the internal inquiry into the operation of the careers and occupational information centre.

Miss Widdecombe: I can confirm that two officials in the Careers and Occupational Information Centre have been suspended from duty pending the outcome of an internal investigation.

International Labour Conference

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for publishing the White Paper on the instruments adopted at the 80th session of the International Labour Conference 1993.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today published the White Paper entitled "International Labour Conference".

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 June 1994

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Audiovisual Eureka

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans his Department has for the United Kingdom's forthcoming presidency of Audiovisual Eureka.

Mr. Brooke: The United Kingdom presidency of Audiovisual Eureka will run from 1 July 1994 to 30 June 1995.

Our objectives for the presidency will be to enhance and give priority to those aspects of Audiovisual Eureka which complement other European initiatives aimed at strengthening the European audiovisual industry. We shall place particular emphasis on those which foster practical co-operation between western European countries and the countries of central and eastern Europe. We shall also aim to promote the use of new technologies for the production of films and programmes; and we shall seek to promote audiovisual technology transfer between east and west.

A central part of the United Kingdom presidency work programme will be to oversee an independent evaluation of Audiovisual Eureka as part of a thorough review of its effectiveness, and to ensure that any recommendations arising from the review are implemented.

I shall be inviting Ministers of the 32 participating countries, as well as the European Commission and Council of Europe, to attend a meeting in London on 16 June 1995 to mark the culmination of our presidency.

Football Stadiums

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he has reached his final decision on applications received from Premier League and first division football clubs for an extension to the Government's 1 August all-seater deadline.

Mr. Brooke: I have. On 26 May, in answer to a written parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), columns *227-29*, I announced that I had considered applications made by 11 clubs, and having taken into account the recommendations made by the Football Licensing Authority, formed a preliminary view. I also set out the criteria against which each application had been assessed.

"Clubs seeking an extension in order to relocate to a new ground are expected to produce clear evidence that such an extension would be for a strictly limited period and that the club could realistically complete its relocation within a reasonable and definite time scale.

Clubs applying for an extension in order to redevelop their existing grounds are expected to show why their circumstances are wholly exceptional, why the reasons for the delay could not reasonably have been foreseen and why they could not be attributed to the actions or inaction of the club."

Clubs were given until 16 June to make further representations to me in support of their case, before I announced my final decision.

On the basis of the information then before me, I indicated that I was minded to agree that the following clubs, all of which are actively engaged in relocation to new stadia, have a valid case for an extension of the 1 August deadline:

Derby County
Grimsby Town
Middlesbrough
Portsmouth
Sunderland

I have today written to the chairmen of each of these clubs to confirm that my final decision is to grant limited extensions in each case.

I have warned, however, that although I have granted an extension, my general policy remains, and I have in mind that the extensions will be for one year only. I have also explained that any decision to allow the retention of standing accommodation for a limited period will not affect safety requirements at the ground. Clubs will still be required to observe the terms and conditions of the local authority safety certificate issued under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, and any requirement placed on the club as a result of the FLA exercising its powers under section 13 of the Football Spectators Act 1989. The responsibility of each club to ensure that the ground meets the necessary safety requirements remains unchanged, irrespective of whether or not an extension is granted.

On 26 May, I also wrote to the chairmen of the following clubs indicating that, although I appreciated the very real difficulties they faced, I did not consider that the case they had presented was sufficiently strong to warrant an extension of the deadline beyond 1 August 1994:

Barnsley
Chelsea
Manchester City
Newcastle United
Oldham Athletic
Swindon Town

I said that in reaching my final decision I would consider each case on its individual merits in the light of the above criteria, having regard to all material facts and to the need to be consistent where circumstances are similar and fair to all clubs in the Premier League and Football League first division. I said that I would also take into account any other relevant points which the clubs wish to make in response to my letters.

Representations were received from five of these clubs before the 16 June deadline. I have given careful consideration to the points raised, and have also reviewed the original applications which each club made to the Football Licensing Authority.

I have decided that only one of these clubs, Newcastle United, has presented a sufficiently exceptional case to warrant an extension to the deadline, and that I would not be justified in granting extensions to Barnsley, Chelsea, Manchester City, Oldham Athletic or Swindon Town. I have therefore written to the chairmen of each of these clubs to inform them of my final decision.

I have today laid an Order under section 11 of the Football Spectators Act 1989 directing the Football Licensing Authority to include in its licences the following conditions:

Only seated accommodation shall be provided for spectators at a designated football match; and

Spectators shall only be admitted to watch a designated football match from seated accommodation.

The order will come into force on 15 July, and will apply to all clubs in the Premier League and first division of the Football League, save those which have been granted extensions to the 1 August deadline. The following clubs promoted into the—now—first division since 1991 will also be omitted from the order:

Bolton Wanderers—promoted in 1993
Burnley—promoted in 1994
Port Vale—promoted in 1994
Reading—promoted in 1994
Stoke City—promoted in 1993
West Bromwich Albion—promoted in 1993

These clubs will have three years from the date of their promotion to ensure that their grounds are all-seated.

I am pleased to report that the majority of clubs in the top two divisions will meet or are planning to meet the Government's deadline. I congratulate those clubs on the great strides they have made in improving the safety and comfort of spectators at their grounds. I will follow closely the progress made by clubs to which I have granted an extension, and I look forward to being able to report that these clubs also have successfully achieved all-seater stadiums.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Romanian Children

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what projects to improve the care and education of Romania's children are being supported through the Poland and Hungary assistance for economic restructuring—PHARE—programme of the European Union; and how British organisations are contributing.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A wide range of projects to improve the care and education of children in Romania are being supported under the PHARE programme. They include: in health care, particularly maternal and infant health services; the rehabilitation of orphanages and the training of personnel; the establishment—in concert with the Romanian Government—of a national policy for the protection of children; and the development of strategies to prevent the institutionalisation of vulnerable groups of children.

European Commission data on contracts awarded under PHARE are not broken down by recipient country. Between 1990 and 1993, 125 contracts were awarded to British organisations working in the areas of non governmental organisations, social adjustment, humanitarian aid, science and techonology, health and public administration.

Ethiopia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received about deaths occurring in Omo valley district in southern Ethiopia because of transport difficulties in reaching famine victims; and what the Government and the European Union are doing to overcome these difficulties.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are in touch with the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission—RRC—about the situation. There are no official figures for deaths from drought and famine. The terrain in much of the region is mountainous with poor or non-existent roads. Road and air access is difficult; ox carts are often the only means of transporting supplies.

The RRC is planning to carry out a helicopter survey of the remoter areas of the region to assess accurately needs and access routes. We are prepared to help with the survey and with implementing its recommendations.

Since January, we have committed 45,000 tonnes of bilateral food aid to Ethiopia. The EU has committed 264,000 tonnes. We have also provided about £191,000 for seeds and tools and therapeutic feeding centres throughout the Omo region.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what overseas aid Her Majesty's Government are currently providing to Pakistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* Gross British bilateral aid to Pakistan for 1992-93—the latest year for which figures are available—was £34·483 million. This consisted of £18·619 million under the ODA's bilateral country programme, £12·676 million in Commonwealth Development Corporation investments and £3·188 million in other aid, including debt relief and drug related assistance.

Recent initiatives include projects in primary education and health, family planning and participatory urban and rural development. Other main sectors covered are land development and irrigation, energy and water and sanitation.

Brazil (Mahogany)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he makes of the percentage of mahogany exported from Brazil to the United Kingdom which has been obtained illegally in Brazil.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no reliable means of assessing whether or not timber entering the United Kingdom has come from an illegal source in its country of origin. The legality of timber extraction is a matter for the authorities in the country in which it takes place.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Debts (Non-payment)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 20 Prison Service establishments to which the largest number of those found guilty of offences in respect of non-payment of debt were committed in the latest period of 12 months for which there is information, specifying in addition how many of these offenders were sentenced for non-payment of *(a)* television licences and *(b)* community charge.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is given in the tables separately for the non-criminal offences of non-payment of debt and also for non-payment of fine for using a television without a licence.

The 20 Prison Service establishments receiving the most non-criminal prisoners committed to custody for the non-criminal offences of non-payment of debt in England and Wales, May 1993—April 1994[1]

Prison Service establishment ranked by number received for non-payment of debt	*Numbers received for non-payment of debt*	
	Total	*of which, Non-payment of community charge*
1. Liverpool	134	129
2. Hull	120	109
3. Leicester	94	79
4. Leeds	74	32
5. Woodhill	73	72
6. Durham	55	54
7. Canterbury	54	54
8. Preston	54	54
9. Lincoln	52	18
10. Shrewsbury	40	39
11. Bedford	38	28
12. Lewes	38	24
13. Risley	37	31
14. Birmingham	35	34
15. Drake Hall	34	33
16. Holme House	33	32
17. Swansea	32	30
18. Low Newton	31	30
19. New Hall	30	25
20. Pentonville	30	25

[1] Provisional figures.

The 20 Prison Service establishments receiving the largest numbers committed to custody for non-payment of a fine for using a television without a licence, May 1993-April 1994[1]

Prison Service establishment	*Number*
1. Risley	83
2. Liverpool	69
3. New Hall	68
4. Holloway	55
5. Low Newton	47
6. Hull	44
7. Birmingham	43
8. Pucklechurch	34
9. Leicester	33
10. Leeds	33
11. Lincoln	27
12. Shrewsbury	25
13. Drake Hall	23
14. Holme House	21
15. Exeter	20
16. Blakenhurst	18
17. Pentonville	13
18. Bedford	12
19. Preston	12
20. Durham	11
Canterbury	11
Wood Hill	11

[1] Provisional figures.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals his Department has to make it an offence to employ an illegal immigrant.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At present, although it is an offence knowingly to harbour an illegal entrant or an overstayer, there is no general requirement on employers to satisfy themselves as to the immigration status of their employees. The immigration service already gives priority to detecting those working here illegally and taking subsequent action to curtail their stay or remove them from the United Kingdom. The Government keep the law in this area under review and expect employers to behave responsibly.

Racial Incidents

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racial incidents were recorded by each police force in England and Wales in 1993.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is now collected on a financial year basis. The figures for 1993-94 are given: these have been collected by the same means as figures published for earlier periods, and they are comparable. I will be considering further the arrangements which are in place for collecting and publishing such figures in future in the light of the recent report by the Home Affairs Select Committee on racial attacks and harassment—HC 71-1.

Reported racial incidents April 1993—March 1994

	Number
Avon and Somerset	159
Bedfordshire	60
Cambridge	100
Cheshire	98
City of London	1
Cleveland	50
Cumbria	17
Derbyshire	221
Devon and Cornwall	14
Dorset	25
Durham	32
Dyfed-Powys	0
Essex	133
Gloucestershire	28
Greater Manchester	658
Gwent	21
Hampshire	212
Hertfordshire	117
Humberside	79
Kent	160
Lancashire	262
Leicestershire	315
Lincolnshire	4
Merseyside	155
Norfolk	33
North Wales	2
North Yorkshire	22
Northamptonshire	102
Northumbria	405
Nottinghamshire	264
South Wales	400
South Yorkshire	106
Staffordshire	117
Suffolk	73
Surrey	79
Sussex	214
Thames Valley	166
Warwickshire	87
West Mercia	100
West Midlands	487
West Yorkshire	244
Wiltshire	51
Provincial total	5,873
Metropolitan total	3,889
England and Wales total	9,762

Channel Islands

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the circumstances of the departure from office of the Deputy Bailiff and Lieutenant Bailiff of the island of Jersey.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Appointment as Deputy Bailiff of Jersey is by the Crown, on advice from the Home Secretary in his capacity as the Privy Councillor with special responsibility for Jersey. A Deputy Bailiff may depart from office on the expiry of the period of appointment, or on appointment to other office, or by resignation, or by removal by the Crown acting on advice.

The Bailiff of Jersey of the day may appoint for a purpose ad hoc, or permanently, one or more lieutenant bailiffs. Permanent appointees may resign from office, or be removed from it by the bailiff; otherwise, their appointments end with the departure from office of the Bailiff who appointed them.

Prison Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were allowed to take part in an assisted prison visits scheme during 1993; and what was the total amount of funding paid under this scheme for such visits.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 24 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of people taking part in the assisted prison visit scheme during 1993 and the total amount of funding paid out under it.

The information you request is not available for the calendar year or in the form requested. For the financial year 1993-94 the number of successful applications was 74,280 and the total funds disbursed were £2,236,816.

Firearms

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in incidents involving firearms in each year since 1983.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", copies of which can be found in the Library—latest edition, 1992, Cm 2410, table 3.8. Figures for 1993 are not yet available.

Mrs. Karamat Bi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when arrangements are to be made to issue Mrs. Karamat Bi—Ref.: TH/2964/93—through the British high commission in Islamabad with a visa to visit the United Kingdom following her appeal against refusal to grant being upheld in Leeds on 15 December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A copy of the adjudicator's determination was sent to the entry clearance officer in Islamabad on 6 January. Inquiries are being made into the present position, and the hon. Member will be informed as soon as possible.

Remand

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many males remanded in custody in 1993 spent *(a)* up to one week, *(b)* one to two weeks, *(c)* two to four weeks, *(d)* four to eight weeks, *(e)* eight weeks to three months, *(f)* three to six months, *(g)* six months to 12 months and *(h)* over 12 months in prison before their court case was concluded;

(2) how many females remanded in custody in 1993 spent *(a)* up to one week, *(b)* one to two weeks, *(c)* two to four weeks, *(d)* four to eight weeks, *(e)* eight weeks to three months, *(f)* three to six months, *(g)* six to 12 months and *(h)* over 12 months in prison before their court case was concluded.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 24 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions asking how many males and females remanded in custody in 1993 spent *(a)* up to one week, *(b)* one to two weeks, *(c)* two to four weeks, *(d)* four to eight weeks, *(e)* eight weeks to three months, *(f)* three to six months, *(g)* six months to 12 months and *(h)* over 12 months in prison before their court case was concluded.

The available information is given in the attached table.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1993
By length of time since first reception[1]
England and Wales

Number of persons[2]

Length of time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment	*Males*	*Females*
All lengths	10,250	400
Up to and including 1 week	1,000	50
More than 1 week up to and including 2 weeks	800	50
More than 2 weeks up to and including 4 weeks	1,300	50
More than 4 weeks up to and including 8 weeks	1,750	70
More than 8 weeks up to and including 3 months	1,500	70
More than 3 months up to and including 6 months	2,300	80
More than 6 months up to and including 12 months	1,300	40
Over 12 months	400	10

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excluding time spent in police cells beforehand.

[2] Rounded estimates which therefore may not add to the totals.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Assistance

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the regions of the United Kingdom that have received European regional development funding in each of the last three years; and what was the amount of the funding to each region.

Mr. Sainsbury: The last programme period for the European regional development fund ran for five years, from 1989 to 1993. The table gives a breakdown of the ERDF funding provided by objective and by region during that time.

Objective 1 is for development and structural adjustment of the regions whose development is lagging behind. Objective 2 is for converting regions or parts of regions seriously affected by industrial decline. Objective 5(b) is for development of rural areas. These objectives are specifically regional in nature; they involve measures restricted to certain eligible regions or parts of regions.

Smaller sums shown in the table as "miscellaneous", were made available outside the objective 1, 2 and 5(b) areas.

ERDF Allocations 1989 to 1993 Objectives 1,2 and 5b

£ million 1994 prices	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1989-93*
Objective 1						
Northern Ireland	53	63	64	95	93	369
Objective 2						
North East England	35	44	41	59	60	240
East England	54	68	63	91	92	368
West Midlands	40	51	47	68	69	276
North West England	47	59	55	79	81	321
West Cumbria	2	2	2	3	3	13
West Scotland	46	59	54	79	80	318
East Scotland	15	19	18	25	26	103
South Wales	23	29	27	39	40	158
North East Wales	7	9	8	12	12	47
Total Objective 2	269	340	315	456	463	1,844
Objective 5b						
South West England	8	20	16	12	10	66
Rural Wales	11	29	24	17	15	95
Highlands and Islands	10	27	22	16	14	89
Dumfries and Galloway	1	3	3	2	2	11
Total Objective 5b	30	80	65	46	40	261
Miscellaneous	—	—	—	4	6	10

Mahogany

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what are the sources of his Department's data on the importation of Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will list the Brazilian companies from which mahogany was imported into the United Kingdom during 1993;

(3) which United Kingdom companies imported mahogany during 1993 from the *(a)* Bannach, *(b)* Perachi, *(c)* Maginco and *(d)* Impar companies of Brazil;

(4) how much mahogany from Brazil by volume and value was imported into the United Kingdom in 1993.

Mr. Needham: There are no official sources for information on the importation of Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom. The information has not been available since 1992 because the United Kingdom trade classification no longer separately identifies mahogany from several other non-coniferous woods.

Information on United Kingdom importing companies and Brazilian exporting companies is not available.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he intends to take in order to ensure that illegally felled mahogany from Brazil does not enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Needham: The Government have no reliable or practical way of identifying Brazilian mahogany which has come from an illegal source. Nor is there any legitimate way in which the United Kingdom could adopt a national ban on the import of such products. Primary responsibility for ensuring that harvesting and export is carried out lawfully must rest with the Brazilian Government.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Correspondence

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the latest figures showing the volume of correspondence from hon. Members to Ministers and agency chief executives, the targets set for reply and the percentage of replies sent within target.

Mr. David Davis: The 1993 figures are set out in the table. The table also sets out figures showing ministerial correspondence in 1992 first published on 23 March 1993, *Official Report*, columns *550-54*.

Correspondence from Members of Parliament to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives

Department or Agency	1992 Target set for reply (working days)	1992 Number of letters received	1992 Percentage of replies within target	1993 Target set for reply (working days)	1993 Number of letters received	1993 Percentage of replies within target
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	15	11,001	81	15	11,150	69
Cabinet Office (OPSS)	15	492	57	15	911	59
Central Statistical Office	18	26	85	[1]10	63	77
Crown Prosecution Service	15	102	67	15	229	66
Customs and Excise	18	[2]682	90	18	[3]6,457	55
Ministry of Defence	15	5,189	74	15	6,374	75
Defence Research Agency	—	—	—	15	53	66
Department for Education	20	15,192	72	20	[3]17,049	84
Teacher's Pensions Agency	10	115	93	10	98	92
Department of Employment	17	[4]3,797	96	15	7,604	85
Employment Service	15	248	94	15	313	92
Department of the Environment	15	18,103	56	15	21,057	54
Planning Inspectorate Agency	8	430	81	8	[5]555	80
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	10	7,921	76	10	9,641	83
Department of Health	20	16,353	72	20	19,822	72
Medicines Control Agency	—	—	—	15	13	90
NHS Pensions Agency	—	—	—	20	14	100
Her Majesty's Stationery Office	—	—	—	5	11	100
Home Office	15	2,221	22	[6]15	15,950	25
	25	3,171	61	[6]25	11,318	52
HM Prison Service[7]	—	—	—	[7]25	348	54
United Kingdom Passport Agency	10	51	29	15	40	83
Inland Revenue	18	[3]680	27	[8]18	[3]4,202	45
	23	[3]202	12	[9]23	[3]805	39
Valuation Office	—	—	—	23	[3]74	45
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	15	729	82	15	[10]675	77
Lord Chancellor's Department	20	5,417	84	20	6,716	84
Land Registry	—	—	—	20	40	100
Department of National Heritage	18	2,007	55	18	[11]1,145	83
Northern Ireland Office	10	3,194	57	[12]10	[3]3,814	66
(inc. Northern Ireland Departments)	15	3,061	77	[12]15	[3]2,057	73
Child Support Agency (NI)	—	—	—	10	27	96
Compensation Agency (NI)	7	34	79	7	80	85
Rate Collection Agency (NI)	7	12	75	5	13	100
Social Security Agency (NI)	20	43	91	10	28	82
Overseas Development Administration	15	5,500	63	15	4,218	87
The Scottish Office	17	3,393	57	17	6,860	52
Department of Social Security	20	14,222	63	20	23,518	76
Benefits Agency	20	20,822	64	20	[14]28,242	84
Child Support Agency[15]	—	—	—	20	2,222	13
Contributions Agency	20	340	63	20	264	70
Department of Trade and Industry	10	28,129	63	10	[3]25,988	66
Companies House	10	79	42	10	159	46
Insolvency Service	10	60	91	10	30	97
Radiocommunications Agency	10	25	96	10	43	100
Department of Transport	15	16,987	74	15	[3]24,754	71
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	10	891	98	10	345	95
Driving Standards Agency	15	123	91	10	91	96
Vehicle Inspectorate	10	61	72	15	15	93
Her Majesty's Treasury	15	[3]1,241	58	15	[3]11,396	58

Department or Agency	1992 Target set for reply (working days)	1992 Number of letters received	1992 Percentage of replies within target	1993 Target set for reply (working days)	1993 Number of letters received	1993 Percentage of replies within target
Welsh Office	12	3,022	61	12	3,468	81
CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments)	12	21	90	12	31	91

Notes on 1993 figures[16]

[1] Represents target set for Central Statistical Office (CSO) to submit replies to HM Treasury. In addition, the chief executive received three letters directly from Members of Parliament, all of which were answered within the 10-working day target.
[2] Figures cover November and December 1992 only.
[3] Includes all ministerial replies, not only letters from Members of Parliament.
[4] Figures cover 1 January to 31 August 1992. On 1 September new 15 working day target was set. From 1 September to 31 December 1992, 91 per cent. of 2,205 letters received were replied to within target.
[5] Figure includes 29 cases relating to Wales—with effect from 1 April 1993.
[6] Targets within the Home Office are actually expressed in calendar days, because of bank holidays therefore, performance will occasionally be measured against fewer than the 15—or 25—working day target. 25 working day target is for replies to Immigration and nationality department, Prison Service and United Kingdom Passport Agency subjects, 15 working day target is for all other subjects. Members of Parliament are encouraged to write direct to the immigration and nationality department board. These letters are included in the totals shown. New Home Office targets were adopted on 1 October 1992 and some 20,000 cases in 1992-93 were not included in the main chart.
[7] HM Prison Service established as an agency on 1 April 1993. Targets within the Prison Service are actually expressed in calendar days, because of bank holidays therefore, performance will occasionally be measured against fewer than the 25 working day target.
[8] Head office figures.
[9] Local office figures.
[10] Figure excludes letters received by the legal secretariat to the Law Officers which were subsequently replied to by either the Director of Public Prosecutions or the Director of the Serious Fraud Office.
[11] Represents correspondence received since 1 April 1993 when new computer recording system was introduced.
[12] Replies signed by Minister.
[13] Replies signed by Private Secretary to Minister.
[14] Includes correspondence from Members of Parliament sent directly to local operational units.
[15] Child Support Agency was launched on 5 April 1993.
[16] The 1992 figures were taken from the *Official Report*, 23 March 1993, columns *550-54*. Please also refer to notes given with that reply.

In addition, the following Departments/agencies received at least one but less than 10 letters from Members of Parliament in 1993 and are not shown in the table:

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food – Intervention Board, ADAS, Veterinary Medicines Directorate.
Cabinet Office – Central Office of Information, Occupational Health Service, Recruitment and Assessment Services.
Ministry of Defence – Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Defence Accounts Agency, Defence Analytical Services Agency, Defence Animal Centre, Defence Postal and Courier Services, Queen Victoria School, RAF Maintenance.
Department of the Environment – Building Research Establishment, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, The Buying Agency, The Security Facilities Executive.
Export Credits Guarantee Department.
Attorney General – Government Property Lawyers Agency.
Northern Ireland Office (including Northern Ireland Departments) – Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (NI), Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency (NI), Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, Training and Employment Agency (NI), Valuation and Lands Agency (NI).
Overseas Development Administration – Natural Resources Institute.
Ordnance Survey.
Scottish Office – Historic Scotland, Scottish Prison Service.
Serious Fraud Office.
Department of Social Security – Information Technology Services Agency, Resettlement Agency.
Department of Trade and Industry – Accounts Services Agency National Physical Laboratory, Patent Office.
Department of Transport – Vehicle Certification Agency, Transport Research Laboratory.

Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what key targets have been set for the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency for the current financial year.

Mr. David Davis: I have set the following targets for Recruitment and Assessment Services for 1994-95:

1. Financial break-even in accruals terms;

2. A 2 per cent. increase in efficiency over 1993-94 performance;

3. evaluation ratings of 96 per cent. of RAS customers satisfied with the service they have received, and 75 per cent. of these giving "more than satisfied" or "highly satisfied" assessments.

EDUCATION

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) any other services in 1980 to 1983, 1984 to 1987, 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993.

Mr. Forth: The information for the periods 1980 to 1983 and 1984 to 1987 is not available, and the information requested for the periods 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993 broken down in the format could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The total number of contracts and the value of those contracts with the companies referred to for the periods 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993 is as follows:

1988 to 1991

	Contracts	£
Coopers and Lybrand	17	387,500
KPMG Peat Marwick	11	525,000
Ernst and Young	2	51,000
Price Waterhouse	2	61,000
Touche Ross	6	235,000
Robson Rhodes	1	22,250

No contracts were placed in this period with Arthur Anderson, Grant Thornton and Pannell Kerr Forster.

1992 to 1993

Company	Contracts	£
Coopers and Lybrand	12	1,708,000
KPMG Peat Marwick	9	236,500
Ernst and Young	2	51,000
Price Waterhouse	5	111,500
Touche Ross	4	116,500

No contracts were placed in this period with Arthur Anderson, Grant Thornton, Robson Rhodes and Pannell Kerr Forster.

St. Paul's Primary School

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the architects and building branch of his Department will make its recommendation on the St. Paul's primary school nursery class building in Hammersmith.

Mr. Forth: A letter giving full approval to the building project was despatched to the local education authority on 25 May 1994, with a request to forward a copy of the letter to the school governors.

Higher Education

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what advice he has given to the Higher Education Funding Council for England regarding efficiency gains from *(a)* teaching and *(b)* research funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The spending plans announced in last year's Budget imply annual efficiency gains in the HEFCE sector of 4 per cent. in 1994-95 and 1995-96 and 3 per cent. in 1996-97. Separately, we have asked the HEFCE to maintain broadly the current proportional split between funds for teaching and research, and it will monitor the impact of these arrangements.

TREASURY

Life Insurance Directives

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the consequences for the taxation of insurance activities of the coming into force of the European Community's third life insurance directive —92/96/EEC—and third non-life insurance directive— 92/49/EEC.

Mr. Dorrell: The third life and non-life insurance directives come into force on 1 July 1994. They are an important part of measures being taken to create a single market in financial services throughout the European Union. One effect of the directives is that insurance companies whose head office is in another member state of the European Union will not be subject to regulation and supervision by the Department of Trade and Industry under the Insurance Companies Act 1982. This will have the effect of taking these companies outside the tax rules which apply to insurance companies because those tax rules are based on provisions of the Insurance Companies Act which will no longer apply to them.

As a result, we shall be introducing legislation in the next Finance Bill to change the definition of insurance company to ensure that all companies operating in the United Kingdom remain within the special tax rules for insurance companies. We shall also be amending provisions which give relief from tax where there is a transfer of insurance business sanctioned by a court in the United Kingdom so that they also apply where there is a transfer of United Kingdom insurance business sanctioned by the regulatory authorities in another member state.

We will also introduce measures to prevent a loss of tax where there is a transfer of insurance business to a transferee who does not carry on that business in the United Kingdom so as to be within the charge to tax.

Subject to their approval by Parliament, these measures will take effect from 1 July 1994, the date on which the third insurance directives come into force.

I also wish to make it clear that, contrary to some reports, the coming into force of the third life assurance directive will of itself have no effect on the taxation of gains from life assurance policies. At my request, the Inland Revenue is currently conducting a review of life assurance taxation in the light of single market developments and this includes the taxation of policy holders. The Government will decide in due course in the light of that review whether changes to the taxation of gains from life assurance policies are necessary. Meanwhile, the existing rules on policyholder taxation remain in force, and the Inland Revenue will continue to certify policies as "qualifying policies" where they meet the conditions laid down in the legislation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Macedonia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions are being sought by the Greek Government for the lifting of its embargo on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and what his response is to these proposed conditions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Greek Government's decision to close Salonika to Macedonian trade was in reaction to a long-running dispute about the flag, name, symbols and constitution of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We consider the Greek action to be unjustified and support the decision of the European Commission to refer the case to the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in lifting Greece's unilateral sanctions on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Greece still refuses to reopen Salonika to Macedonian trade. On 14 June, the European

Court of Justice heard the Commission's request for interim measures, pending the hearing of the substantive case against Greece. The court's decision is expected shortly. We continue to make clear to the Greek Government that their action is unjustified, and that it should be reversed without precondition.

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what armed activity is taking place in Burundi; and what action is being taken by the United Nations to prevent the Rwandan war from spreading to Burundi.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have had no reports of armed activity in Burundi. The special representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ould Abdullah, heads a small good offices mission in Bujumbura which has been successful in promoting stability in the country.

There are also 47 Organisation of African Unity observers stationed in Burundi in a confidence-building capacity. This mission has the full support of the UN.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many member states of the European Union have totally independent military nuclear weapons.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Two—the United Kingdom and France. The United Kingdom's nuclear forces are assigned to NATO but remain at all times under the control of the British Government.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Nations Security Council last considered Liberia; and what are the latest reports to the United Nations on the progress of its mission there.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Security Council met in late May 1994 to discuss the Secretary-General's report on Liberia of 18 May 1994. The Council President issued a statement on Liberia on behalf of the Security Council on 23 May 1994. Copies of both the statement and the report have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what problems exist with the financing of the United Nations supported peace initiative in Liberia; and which countries have proposed to withdraw.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations status of contributions reports shows that at 30 April 1994, of the $39·8 million assessed on member states for the United Nations observer mission in Liberia—UNOMIL—for the period 22 September 1993 to 21 March 1994, unpaid assessments amounted to $24·6 million.

The United Nations Secretary-General reported on 18 April that as of 31 March, voluntary contributions to the trust fund for the implementation of the Contonou accord amounted to $15·16 million, from the Governments of Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. At the time of the Secretary-General's report, expenditure authorised from the trust fund totalled $11·7 million.

The Secretary-General also reported that, on the basis of a draft budget prepared by a joint mission of the United Nations and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in September 1993, the Elections Commission has estimated that an overall amount of $13·7 million will be required to carry out the electoral process. The report stated that the transitional Government will endeavour to provide some $8·5 million of this amount and will seek international support for the remaining $5·2 million.

Of the United Nations troop contributors, only Tanzania has announced a decision to withdraw.

European Union

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subjects he has sought to bring to the attention of the Greek Government for discussion during their period as holders of the presidency of the European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We have had discussions on a full range of European and international issues with the Greek Government during their presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Brazil

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will instruct appropriate United Kingdom diplomatic staff in Brazil to discuss with representatives of the Nucleus for Indigenous Rights the issue of the mahogany trade between Brazil and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Our embassy in Brasilia is instructed to continue its close contacts with the Nucleus for Indigenous Rights on various issues, including mahogany.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Wolfson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security during the first year of the child support scheme how many parents with care previously in receipt of income support ceased to be eligible as a result of receipt of child maintenance.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support

Mr. Wolfson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of those parents who have ceased to receive income support as a result of receiving child support during the first year of the scheme, in how many cases their resulting income has been *(a)* up to £5, *(b)* up to £10, *(c)* up to £15 and *(d)* up to £20 per week above income support level.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many contracts, and for what total sum were let out by his Department or agencies for which

it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Authur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) any other services in 1980 to 1983, 1984 to 1987, 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available follows:

Firm	*Number of contracts*	*Total value (£)*
1986-87		
Coopers and Lybrand	1	5,635·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	0	0
Ernst and Young	2	60,145·00
Price Waterhouse	3	112,971·00
Arthur Andersen	0	0
Touche Ross	1	75,306·00
Grant Thornton	1	15,836·00
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0
1987-88		
Coopers and Lybrand	3	319,006·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	0	0
Ernst and Young	1	10,459·00
Price Waterhouse	2	42,720·00
Arthur Andersen	0	0
Touche Ross	3	59,601·00
Grant Thornton	1	270·00
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0
1988-89		
Coppers and Lybrand	3	37,341·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	2	10,235·00
Ernst and [illegible]	0	0
Price Waterhouse	2	51,037·00
Arthur Andersen	1	10,000·00
Touche ross	4	258,948·00
Grant Thornton	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0
1989-90		
Coopers and Lybrand	4	262,571·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	2	59,891·00
Ernst and Young	1	14,909·00
Price Waterhouse	6	1,137,894·00
Arthur Andersen	0	0
Touche Ross	3	314,210·00
Grant Thornton	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0
1990-91		
Coopers and Lybrand	5	288,365·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	4	723,280·00
Ernst and Young	5	442,365·00
Price Waterhouse	10	3,587,350·00
Arthur Andersen	0	0
Touche Ross	7	709,104·00
Grant Thornton	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0
1991-92		
Coopers and Lybrand	1	47,290·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	6	136,292·00
Ernst and Young	3	139,502·00
Price Waterhouse	11	952,994·00
Arthur Andersen	0	0
Touche Ross	3	78,294·00
Grant Thornton	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0
1992-93		
Coopers and Lybrand	4	117,775·00
KPMG Peat Marwick	7	447,258·00
Ernst and Young	2	22,637·00
Price Waterhouse	9	259,064·00
Arthur Andersen	0	0
Touche Ross	2	249,620·00
Grant Thornton	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0

Family Credit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support applicants were refused benefit on grounds of *(a)* partners' earnings and *(b)* partners in receipt of family credit in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not routinely collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the research by the social policy research unit on the assessment of self-employed earnings in family credit to be published.

Mr. Burt: The report "Measuring Low Incomes: Self-Employment and Family Credit" by the social policy research unit at the university of York was published on 3 February and copies were placed in the Library.

In addition, I have today placed in the Library copies of the consultation document on the report. We have circulated it to a wide range of interested bodies and have asked for comments by 31 August.

Job Seekers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether *(a)* the Benefits Agency or *(b)* the Employment Service will implement the new job seeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply of Tuesday 21 June at column *87*.

Habitual Residency Test

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what action he intends to take in relation to the habitual residency test; and if he will make a statement:

(2) when the Social Security Advisory Committee reported to him in relation to the proposed habitual residency test; what was the committee's conclusion or main recommendation in this matter; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library;

(3) what parliamentary action is required to implement the habitual residency test in relation to social security payments.

Mr. Burt: We are still considering the introduction of a habitual residence test in the income support, housing

benefit and council tax benefit schemes. The report from the Social Security Advisory Committee and the Government's response will be published at the same time.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received to date concerning the habitual residency test; how many have been *(a)* broadly favourable and *(b)* broadly unfavourable.

Mr. Burt: No separate count has been kept of representations received on this matter.

Benefits Agency

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when the new Benefits Agency premises in Johnstone town centre are scheduled to open; where these will be located; how many staff will be transferred to this location; from where they will be transferred; how many additional jobs will be created at what grade; what new or enhanced services will be available to clients from these new premises; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the total contract value of the new Benefits Agency office in Paisley; when he expects the office to be operational; when he expects the office to be officially opened; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The opening of new Benefits Agency offices in Johnstone and Paisley is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 23 June 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the new Benefits Agency offices in Johnstone and Paisley.

Benefits Agency Estates, in liaison with Property Holdings, are negotiating the acquisition of a lease for Unit 5, William Street, Johnstone which on present plans is scheduled to open as a caller service point by the beginning of 1995.

The six staff currently employed in Johnstone will transfer from Floors Street to the new premises. No additional jobs will be created nor will any be lost.

The move to the main shopping area will mean the new office is more accessible to our customers and will provide an improved service for all members of the public in and around Johnstone.

The total contract value of the new Benefits Agency premises in Paisley is approximately £5·2 million.

It is expected that the new office will be operational in June 1995 with the official opening within 2 months thereafter. Plans for the official opening have yet to be finalised.

The Renfrew District Manager, Colin Wright, will be happy to provide you with any further details should you require them.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Benefits, Doncaster and Mexborough

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current number of recipients of *(a)* income support, *(b)* invalidity benefit and *(c)* retirement pension in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas; and what were the figures (i) 12 months and (ii) 24 months ago.

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 June 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about benefit recipients in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because Benefit Agency (BA) District boundaries do not correspond with county or borough boundaries.

Income Support (IS) recipients in the Doncaster area are dealt with by the Doncaster District of BA. This District comprises Doncaster West District Office (DO) and Doncaster East Branch Office (BO). IS recipients in the Mexborough area are dealt with by the Wath-on-Dearne Branch Office (BO) of the Rother and Dearne District. This office, however, also deals with areas other than Mexborough. Identifying the number of IS recipients resident in the Mexborough area and dealt with by Wath-on-Dearne BO would incur disproportionate cost.

In Appendix 1, I have provided information relating to numbers of IS recipients in the area dealt with by the Doncaster District, and by Wath-on-Dearne BO.

Although the Doncaster District of BA deals with Invalidity Benefit (IVB) and Retirement Pension (RP) for most of the Doncaster area, a small part is dealt with by the Mexborough BO of the BA Rother and Dearne District. Mexborough BO also covers IVB and RP for the Mexborough area, but from May 1994 also assumed responsibility for the Swinton and Wath-on-Dearne areas. Identifying the number of IVB or RP recipients resident in either the Mexborough or Doncaster areas and dealt with by Mexborough BO would also incur disproportionate cost.

However, in Appendices 2 and 3, I have provided information relating to IVB and RP recipients in the areas dealt with by the Doncaster District, and by Mexborough BO.

The figures provided for RP recipients include a small number of Widows Benefit recipients and an estimated number of RP recipients paid by direct credit transfer. The latest information available does not fully reflect the additional numbers appropriate to Mexborough BO following that office assuming responsibility for additional geographical areas in May 1994.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix 1
IS Recipients

	Doncaster District	*Wath-on-Dearne Branch Office*
30 May 1992	27,416	8,736
31 May 1993	28,848	9,556
31 May 1994	30,090	11,703

Appendix 2
IVB Recipients

	Doncaster District	*Mexborough Branch Office*
30 May 1992	11,933	2,319
31 May 1993	13,026	2,435
31 May 1994	13,973	3,943

Appendix 3
RP Recipients

	Doncaster District	*Mexborough Branch Office*
30 May 1992	49,657	6,310
31 May 1993	49,166	6,280
31 May 1994	48,477	6,426

TRANSPORT

Highways Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how often the chief executive of the Highways Agency has met representatives from the private sector to discuss the possibility of market testing, contracting out or privatising work currently undertaken by the agency; and what were the names of the companies involved and the dates of the meetings.

Mr. Key: These questions relate to operational matters of the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 23 June 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Key, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about market testing.

I have not met any representatives from the private sector to discuss the possibility of market testing, contracting out or privatising work currently carried out by the Agency.

Road Schemes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to date of the employment of the Bray's detective agency to gather information on Twyford Down protesters; and from which subheads of which votes these funds were taken.

Mr. Key: This question relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 23 June 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Robert Key, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost of employing Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) to gather evidence of trespass on the M3 construction site near Winchester.

To date, Bray's have been paid £251,656·37. These costs have been met from the Highways Agency Vote 1 (National Road System: Capital Section A1 (New Construction and Renewal) of the Roads Vote.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations his Department has had with environmental groups about individual road schemes.

Mr. Key: This question relates to the operational matters of the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 23 June 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Robert Key, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary question about what consultations there have been with environmental groups with regard to individual road schemes.

Consultations with statutory bodies such as English Nature, English Heritage, the Countryside Commission and the National Rivers Authority take place from an early stage of route development.

Other environmental groups are given the opportunity to comment on a proposed scheme at public consultation and when the draft orders for the preferred route are published.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) any other services in 1980 to 1983, 1984 to 1987, 1988 to 1991 and 1992 to 1993.

Mr. Norris: The information requested cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost for contracts let before 1989. Those let in the period 1989 to 1993 are shown in the table.

(a) *Coopers and Lybrand*

(i) 1991: Railways privatisation—value £1,446,808
1992: DVOIT privatisation strategy review—value £15,000
1993: Railways privatisation—value £425,532

(iv) 1992: Temporary finance director—value £52,000

(v) 1992: Financial audit of DVOIT—value £7,532

(vi) 1989: Birmingham northern relief road—assessment of proposals and financial advice on concession agreement—value £1,374,000
1989: Cashless parking equipment—value £50,000
1990: Financial advisers on private roads—value £150,000
1991: Study of EC directives and liberalisation—value £450,377
1992: Evaluation of telesales tenders—value £18,000
1993: Two seminars on tender evaluation—value £2,000
1993: Sale of anonymised data—value £25,000
1993: Evaluation of vehicle re-licensing tenders—value £25,000
1993: Scottish Office road safety review—value £18,000
1993: Review of NMCS maintenance contract specification and performance—value £59,794

(b) *KPMG Peat Marwick*

(i) 1992: Financial advice on DVOIT privatisation—value £553,820
1993: TRL privatisation study—value £78,150
1993: Railways privatisation—value £2,893,618

(iv) 1990: Implementation of a computerised accounting system—value £94,000

(vi) 1989: Network information system—value not known
1990: Routine maintenance management system—value £174,500
1991: PMS implementation study—value £146,954
1991: Audit of ex-Trinity House liquidated funds—value £4,800
1992: Network referencing—value £101,300
1992: DISC network policy—value £70,846
1992: IT/IS strategy advice—value £90,000
1992: Project management software—value £171,980
1993: Purchasing and supply IT system study—value £43,880

(c) *Ernst and Young*

(i) 1992: DVOIT privatisation—value £2,000
1993: Railways privatisation—value £680,851

(vi) 1990: Consultancy advice to DVLA—value £111,000
1992: European engineering standards study—value £87,414
1992: Payroll costs model—value £106,000
1993: OPRAF consultancy—two contracts, total value £170,000
1993: IT strategy support—value £38,545

(d) *Price Waterhouse*

(i) 1991: Privatisation of trust ports—value £886,233
1992: DVOIT privatisation—three contracts, total value 86,127
1992: Privatisation of London Buses—value £551,000
1993: VI privatisation feasibility study—value £72,500
1993: Advice to TRL on privatisation—value £9,230

(iv) 1992: Consultancy advice to DVLA—value £162,000

(vi) 1992: Taxation/company car advice—value £5,850

(e) *Arthur Andersen*

Nil

(f) *Touche Ross*

(ii) 1993: Advice to DVLA on market testing—value £139,000

(vi) 1990: The impact of price-fixing agreements—value £5,000
1990: Future of Greater Manchester Buses—value £53,120
1992: Accommodation management information system—value £87,799

(g) *Grant Thornton*

Nil

(h) *Robson Rhodes*

Nil

(i) *Pannell Kerr Forster*

Nil

Marine Pollution

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to request MARPOL—the marine pollution convention—to give special area status against oil pollution for the North sea.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Mr. Walley) on 10 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *471*.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the last financial year the total salary costs plus bonuses for each of his agency chief executives and his Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Norris: Information on agency chief executives' salaries was set out in the answer I gave the hon. Lady on 21 March, *Official Report*, column *103*. Details of chief executives' total remuneration including bonuses in 1993-94 will be published in the annual report for each agency. The salary of the Permanent Secretary was £90,148 per annum with effect from 1 April 1993.

Road Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has of changes in the severity of road accident injuries resulting from the use of bull bars on road vehicles.

Mr. Key: We have no direct evidence. Impact tests using an instrumented child-size headform on a bull bar have shown that the severity of an impact on a bull bar appears significantly more than on a flexible bonnet. We have, therefore, taken steps to identify accidents where a pedestrian has been struck by a vehicle fitted with a bull bar with a view to determining whether bull bars are, in fact, causing increased injuries.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the numbers of road traffic accidents in each year since 1983 involving at least one motor vehicle driver who had been previously advised by a medical practitioner that they were not medically fit to drive; and how many involved *(a)* serious injuries and *(b)* fatalities.

Mr. Key: This information is not available.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he intends to issue the safeguarding direction for the route of the new channel tunnel rail link at Pepper Hill in the borough of Gravesham;

(2) when he intends to issue the safeguarding directions for the route of the new channel tunnel rail link at Ashford in Kent.

Mr. Freeman: Safeguarding directions for the route of the new channel tunnel rail link at both Pepper Hill and Ashford were issued yesterday and will come into force today. Copies are being placed in the Library.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ports which have facilities to accept chemical contaminated waste.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* The Marine Safety Agency is currently undertaking a comprehensive survey of the provision of reception facilities in United Kingdom ports. The results of the survey will be published when they have been evaluated.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to improve the monitoring of non-accidental discharges in United Kingdom territorial waters.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* All United Kingdom registered ships, aircraft and offshore installations are asked to report any incidents or sightings of oil to the United Kingdom Coastguard who passes the information to the marine pollution control unit. The MPCU carries out 500 hours of aerial surveillance per annum, using aircraft fitted with specialised electronic equipment for detecting oil slicks on the surface of the sea. This is targeted on the main shipping lanes where non-accidental discharges are known to occur most often.

These measures are considered adequate for the purposes of monitoring non-accidental discharges, and there are no plans to change or increase them.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ratify annex IV of the marine pollution convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* The Government will consider ratification of annex IV of MARPOL when the findings of a comprehensive survey of United Kingdom reception facilities, including those for sewage, are available later in the year.

ENVIRONMENT

Brixton City Challenge

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what indication he has given to Brixton city challenge that its grant is to be curtailed.

Mr. Baldry: Following a ministerial annual review of Brixton challenge, officials wrote to the chairman of the company on 10 March, indicating that it was not possible to approve the 1994-95 action plan at that time. Since then, the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction has met representatives of the three parties on Lambeth council, and the chairman of Brixton challenge. Satisfactory assurances have been given with regard to the implementation of the Brixton challenge 1994-95 action plan, and the Minister therefore wrote to the party leaders and chairman on 22 June confirming the continuation of funding.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on Brixton city challenge.

Mr. Baldry: It was not possible to approve a second year of operation for Brixton challenge before the start of the current financial year because of their poor performance in 1993-94. However, assurances have now been given by the three party leaders at Lambeth that they will fully support Brixton challenge in the future, and the 1994-95 action plan has been revised by the company to make up for outputs lost last year. In these circumstances, the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction wrote to the Brixton challenge chairman and the Lambeth party leaders on 22 June informing them that he is now willing to approve a continuation of funding.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received concerning Brixton city challenge.

Mr. Baldry: The Department has recently received three representations concerning Brixton city challenge.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of England's housing stock is constructed or adapted to meet the needs of physically disabled people at the latest date for which information is available; if he will break this information down into categories of housing tenure; what plans he has to enhance the availability of such housing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Department collects information for England on building starts and completions of specialised housing for the chronically sick and disabled, and on conversions or improvements for disabled persons, but not on the stock of such dwellings for physically disabled people.

The available figures of housebuilding starts and completions by housing associations and local authorities for the chronically sick and disabled are shown in "Housing and Construction Statistics". Provisional data for 1993-94 in England are to be published shortly in the March quarter 1993 issue, part 1, and these are given in the table.

New housebuilding completions for the chronically sick and disabled England: 1993-94

	Housing associations	*Local authorities*	*Totals*
Wheelchair	136	7	143
Mobility	810	59	869
All	946	66	1,012

The numbers of dwellings converted or improved for disabled persons are published in "Housing and Construction Statistics". The latest available financial year figures are for 1992-93 and are on tables 2.19 and 2.20 of the December quarter 1993 issue, part 2.

All new housing association dwellings are required to be built to mobility standards. Allocations and priorities for local authority dwellings are determined by the individual authorities. The Department is considering whether to extend part M of the Building Regulations to cover all new buildings.

Housebuilding

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for the last 15 years, in respect of the number of permanent dwellings *(a)* started, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* completed; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Estimates of housebuilding starts and completions, and dwellings under construction in England are shown in the quarterly and annual publication "Housing and Construction Statistics".

Figures for 1991 and 1992, with provisional figures for 1993, are in the December quarter 1993 edition, part 1, table 1·2*(a)*; and those for each year from 1982 to 1990 are in table 6.1 *(a)* of the 1982 to 1992 annual edition. Figures for 1979 to 1981 are in the same table of the editions for earlier years: 1980 and 1981 figures are in the 1980-1990 edition, and 1979 figures are in the 1979-1989 edition.

Copies of these publications are in the Library.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Building Defects

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations his Department has received *(a)* about the amount of award given to plaintiffs who have successfully sued professional advisers who have been negligent in reporting defects in a building that the plaintiff has purchased and *(b)* about cases where the cost to the plaintiff of repairing the building is very much higher than the award given by the court because the award given by the court reflects what the value of the property would have been if the purchaser had known about the defect but was still willing to purchase but at a lower price; and if he will make proposals to enable courts to award the full reinstatement cost.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There has been correspondence between the Lord Chancellor's Department and my hon. Friend about the principles which apply in these cases. We do not propose to change those principles.

Community Charge Offences

Ms Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases involving community charge offences have been taken to the High Court for judicial review, or are awaiting a date for a judicial review.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Schedule 4 to the Local Government Act 1988 provides for certain types of offence. The number of convictions and acquittals under these provisions referred for judicial review cannot be ascertained except at disproportionate cost. For the same reason, it is not possible to provide the number of judicial review cases involving the enforcement of community charge; there are, however, currently 169 such cases awaiting a hearing date.

PRIME MINISTER

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has in respect of the 1996 IGC relating to a written European constitution.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. None.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mahogany

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Attorney-General what action he intends to take in respect of imports of stolen Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: I understand that there are no restrictions on the import of Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom. The procedures for the investigation of criminal offences allegedly committed in relation to Brazilian mahogany are no different from those applicable to any other criminal offence, and the proper course, if it is believed that a criminal offence has been committed within the jurisdiction, is for the facts to be reported to the police.

WALES

Medical Consultants (Merit Awards)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been paid by his Department as merit awards to medical consultants in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is as follows:

Payment of distinction awards to consultants

	£
1983-84	1,841,988
1984-85	1,974,672
1985-86	2,273,522
1986-87	2,617,765
1987-88	2,698,790
1988-89	3,272,598
1989-90	3,753,583
1990-91	4,104,603
1991-92	3,701,500
1992-93	3,340,347

Source: Health authorities annual accounts/financial returns Pembrokeshire NHS trust annual accounts—1992-93 only.

Notes:

1. Includes medical and dental consultants, NHS staff and honorary contract holders.
2. 1992-93 figures are latest available.

Agriculture

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the counties served, the number of hectares and the number of farmers in each of his Department's divisional offices for agriculture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is shown in the table.

Coverage of Welsh Office Divisional Offices[1]

Divisional Office and Counties served	*Hectares of agricultural land*[2]	*Farmers, partners and directors*[3]
Llandrindod Wells		
Powys; South, Mid and West Glamorgan; Gwent	559,635	11,835
Carmarthen		
Dyfed	453,589	12,099
Caernarfon		
Gwynedd; Clwyd	479,798	9,545

Source: June 1993 agricultural census.

[1] The figures shown are for the main holdings and therefore exclude the estimated 6,800 minor holdings in Wales which account for 18,700 hectares of land. Minor holdings data are not available at below national level.

[2] Excludes common rough grazing land.

[3] Farmers, partners and directors working whole-time or part-time on farm holdings on 1 June 1993. Excludes wives/husbands of farmers, partners and directors, even if the wives/husbands themselves may be partners or directors.

EMPLOYMENT

Railway Signalmen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in real earnings of railway signalmen and white collar workers in the private sector since 1979; and what were the corresponding increases in productivity.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The available occupational information from the new earnings survey in 1979 closest to that requested is for full-time railway signalmen and shunters and in 1993 for railway signal operatives, crossing keepers, shunters and points operatives. When adjusted for the increase in the retail prices index at April, the earnings of this group increased by 47·3 per cent. during the period.

The corresponding increase for private sector full-time non-manual employees was 51·6 per cent.

The information requested for productivity is not available.

University Graduates

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of graduates left university and took up careers in industry in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The table shows the number of first degree graduates who were in permanent employment in industry at the end of the calendar year in which they graduated. The figures are expressed as a percentage of all first degree graduates from United Kingdom universities and as a percentage of all those in permanent employment in the United Kingdom. They are derived from surveys published by the "Universities' Statistical Record" and exclude graduates from the former polytechnics and central institutions which received university status from 1992 onwards.

	Per cent. of all graduates	*Per cent. of those in permanent employment*
1990	12·3	28·2
1991	9·4	25·2
1992	8·1	22·9
1993	7·8	21·3

Note: Industry is defined as including agriculture, the extractive industries, utilities, construction, transport and manufacturing.

Barnsley/Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the Barnsley/Doncaster training and enterprise council's budget for *(a)* 1993-94 and *(b)* 1994-95 was devoted to the development of (i) self-employed businesses and (ii) new businesses.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1993-94, of the total training and enterprise council budget for Barnsley and Doncaster, business start-up accounted for 14·1 per cent. of expenditure. The planned expenditure for 1994-95 is 10·9 per cent. of the total TEC budget.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the information he receives from the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC about the operation of local enterprise companies; and what plans he has to increase the information available to him.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils do not provide information about the operation of local enterprise companies.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of his Department's staff who were seconded to the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC have taken advantage of the voluntary early retirement scheme while remaining in employment with the TEC; and at what cost to the voluntary early retirement scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: None.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many overseas persons are currently being trained under the auspices of the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC.

Miss Widdecombe: The training and enterprise council operating agreement precludes TECs from training overseas nationals who are subject to employment restrictions or to a time limit in their stay in Great Britain or both—other than refugees or asylum seekers.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what instructions he has given to the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC in respect of when local enterprise companies may take steps to provide serviced sites.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils are not responsible for local enterprise companies.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made to the cost to public funds of the applicants of voluntary early retirement schemes to secondees from his Department to the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC, combined with the absence of a clawback mechanism for the former civil servants benefiting from the early retirement scheme but continuing in full-time employment with the TEC; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no cost to public funds as I know of no such cases.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the companies used by the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC which are members of the Confederation of British Industry.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each of the last five financial years the date on which the Barnsley/Doncaster training and enterprise council was notified of its yearly budget; when it actually received its funding; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils are notified of their budgets after the public expenditure survey announcement each year. TECs are funded monthly in arrears in accordance with their agreed contract.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of women members of each TEC; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The number of women on training and enterprise council boards is set out in the table. TECs are private companies and are responsible for the composition of their boards.

TEC Name	*Number of female directors*
Avon TEC	3
AZTEC	3
Barnsley/Doncaster TEC	1
Bedfordshire TEC	2
Birmingham TEC	2
Bolton Bury TEC	1
Bradford and District TEC	2
Calderdale/Kirklees TEC	1
CAMBSTEC (Central and South Cambridgeshire)	1
Central England TEC	2

TEC Name	Number of female directors
CENTEC (Central London)	3
CEWTEC (Chester, Ellesmere Port, Wirral)	2
CILNTEC (City and Inner London North)	2
County Durham	2
Coventry and Warwickshire TEC	1
Cumbria TEC	2
Devon and Cornwall TEC	2
Dorset TEC	2
Dudley TEC	1
ELTEC (East Lancashire)	2
Essex TEC	3
Gloucestershire TEC	2
Greater Nottingham TEC	1
Greater Peterborough TEC	1
Hampshire TEC	2
HAWTEC (Hereford and Worcester)	3
Heart of England (Oxfordshire) TEC	3
Hertfordshire TEC	2
Humberside TEC	2
Kent TEC	2
Leeds TEC	1
Leicester TEC	1
Lincolnshire TEC	1
London East TEC	2
Manchester TEC	2
Merseyside TEC	2
Mid Glamorgan TEC	2
Norfolk and Waveney TEC	3
NORMIDTEC (North and Mid Cheshire)	1
North Derbyshire TEC	3
North London TEC	1
North Nottinghamshire TEC	2
North West London TEC	2
North Yorkshire TEC	3
Northamptonshire TEC	2
Northumberland TEC	1
Oldham TEC	2
Powys TEC	2
QUALITEC (St. Helens) Ltd.	2
Rochdale TEC	4
Rotherham TEC	1
Sheffield TEC	2
Shropshire TEC	1
SOLOTEC	2
South and East Cheshire TEC	2
South Thames TEC	3
Southern Derbyshire TEC	3
Stockport/High Peak TEC	2
Suffolk TEC	2
Surrey TEC	2
Sussex TEC	2
TARGED North West Wales TEC	1
Teesside TEC	1
Thames Valley Enterprise	1
Tyneside TEC	2
Wakefield TEC	2
Walsall TEC	2
Wearside TEC	2
West London TEC	2
West Wales TEC	1
Wight Training and Enterprise	1
Wiltshire TEC	2
Wolverhampton TEC	1
Total	137

Astra Training Ltd.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the properties transferred to Astra Training Services Ltd. in 1990 as part of the privatisation of the skills training agency, and their market value at that time; what is the total sum received by the Government in respect of the sales of any of those properties since 1990; and what details have been supplied to him of the current ownership of each of the properties and the current status of the agreement made with Astra Training Services Ltd. regarding the clawback of any profit on the sales of the properties following the company's collapse.

Miss Widdecombe: The following 33 properties were transferred to Astra Training Services Ltd. in 1990 as part of the privatisation of the Skills Training Agency:

Barking	Medway
Basildon	Milton Keynes
Bellshill	North Staffs
Billingham	Norwich
Birmingham	Peterborough
Bradford	Plymouth
Bristol	Preston
Cheshire	Redruth
Dundee	Rochdale
Durham	Sheffield
Enfield	Southampton
Gloucester	Tyneside
Gwent	West Glamorgan
Hillingdon	West Sussex
Hull	Wigan
Irvine	Wrexham
Manchester	

The market value of the properties at the time of the privatisation is a matter of commercial confidentiality. The Government have received no sum in respect of the sale of any of the above properties since 1990 and full details of the current owners of each of the properties have been supplied to the Department, along with confirmation that, in all but one case, the clawback conditions continue to apply to new owners.

None of the sales to date has triggered an actual clawback payment, due mainly to the low values generated in the depressed property market which has prevailed since privatisation.

In the one case where clawback no longer applies, Hillington, the Government accepted a settlement payment —£50,000—to remove the clawback provisions. This was on the advice of the Department's professional advisers, who saw no prospect of any actual clawback payment in a similar amount being triggered within the remaining clawback period.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Social Affairs Council held on 22 June.

Mr. Hunt: I attended the meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council held on 22 June in Luxembourg, and was accompanied by the Minister of State, Department of Employment, and the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt).

The Council agreed to adopt the directive on the protection of young workers and to maintain in full the United Kingdom's renewable option not to apply limits to the working time of children and adolescents in the United Kingdom. Three member states abstained.

The other 11 member states reached a common position on the draft European works councils directive. In accordance with the terms of the social protocol to the Maastricht treaty, this directive will not apply within the United Kingdom and employees based in the United

Kingdom will not count towards the threshold which determines whether the directive applies to multinational companies. As a result, more than 200 British companies which would otherwise have been covered by the directive will not have to establish European works councils. Furthermore, the directive will not oblige any British company to extend European works councils to the United Kingdom. Unlike companies in the other 11 member states, British companies will remain entirely free to decide for themselves what arrangements are best for consulting their United Kingdom employees.

The Council reached agreement unanimously on a regulation to set up a European Health and Safety Agency, which will be sited in Bilbao. The main aims of the agency will be to promote and encourage the dissemination of information on health and safety matters.

The Council also unanimously reached a common position on a new European Community vocational training programme, to be called "Leonardo da Vinci". The proposal will replace a range of existing Community training programmes, PETRA, FORCE, EUROTECNET and COMETT. It will have a budget of 620 mecu over five years.

The Council heard progress reports on the follow-up work to the Delors White Paper and conclusions of the Brussels European Council on competitiveness, growth and employment, on the draft directive on chemical agents and on a commission communication on immigration and asylum policies.

The Council adopted unanimously a resolution on the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women through the action of the European structural funds.

The Commission's draft programme on social exclusion was withdrawn from the agenda by the presidency.

Disabled People

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* disabled men and *(b)* disabled women in (i) the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow and (ii) Scotland as a whole were registered as unemployed at the most convenient date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 June 1994]:* The labour force survey asks people of working age if they currently have a health problem or disability which limits the kind of paid work they can do. Estimates based on answers to this question will include people with short-term or minor health problems and disabilities as well as those registered as disabled.

The latest LFS estimates for summer 1993 show that there were 26,000 such men and 10,000 such women who were International Labour Organisation unemployed and living in Scotland. The information is not available for parliamentary constituencies.

SCOTLAND

Regional and European Elections

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hours on average returning officers and depute returning officers at the regional and European elections are expected to devote to these additional duties; whether it is the normal practice for their employers to allow time off to allow them to perform these additional duties; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no information held centrally about hours worked by returning officers and their deputies when engaged on European parliamentary election work. The arrangements for local government elections are the responsibility of the returning officer and council concerned.

Shetland Oil Spill

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made by the ecological steering group which he appointed on 26 January 1993 to undertake work in relation to the Shetland oil spill.

Sir Hector Monro: The ecological steering group on the oil spill in Shetland, which my right hon. Friend appointed last year under the chairmanship of Professor William Ritchie of Aberdeen university, has now completed its substantive report on the environmental effects of the spill. I expect to publish the report on Monday 27 June, when copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Detention

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the results of the research into detention in Scotland under section 2 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980 and voluntary attendance at police stations are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: A report entitled "Research into Detention and Voluntary Attendance of Suspects at Police Stations" is being published today.

The report shows that despite some difficulties in a small proportion of cases caused by the six-hour limit, the current provisions for detention and voluntary attendance generally work satisfactorily. I do not intend to bring forward any legislative proposals on this subject.

Copies of the report are available in the Library.

HEALTH

Emergency Dental Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family health authorities have been unable to provide emergency dental services in the period since December 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: General dental practitioners have an obligation under their terms of service to provide emergency cover to their registered patients. They may also offer emergency treatment to non-registered patients. Family health services authorities can make arrangements for emergency treatment for those patients who are not registered.

Where there are already adequate emergency services available from general dental practitioners, or the community or hospital dental services, there is no need for FHSAs themselves to make arrangements. All FHSAs report that they can help patients contacting them to receive national health service dental treatment.

The available information is shown in the table:

Total number of family health services authorities reporting that they were not providing or did not need to provide emergency dental services in each week since December 1992[1].

England Week ending	FHSAs
4 December 1992	6
11 December 1992	6
18 December 1992	6
25 December 1992	—
1 January 1993	—
8 January 1993	6
15 January 1993	6
22 January 1993	6
29 January 1993	6
5 February 1993	6
12 February 1993	6
19 February 1993	6
26 February 1993	4
5 March 1993	7
12 March 1993	5
19 March 1993	5
26 March 1993	6
2 April 1993	6
9 April 1993	5
16 April 1993	5
23 April 1993	7
30 April 1993	5
7 May 1993	6
14 May 1993	6
21 May 1993	5
28 May 1993	6
4 June 1993	7
11 June 1993	6
18 June 1993	5
25 June 1993	5
2 July 1993	6
9 July 1993	5
16 July 1993	5
23 July 1993	5
30 July 1993	6
6 August 1993	5
13 August 1993	6
20 August 1993	6
27 August 1993	6
3 September 1993	5
10 September 1993	5
17 September 1993	5
24 September 1993	5
1 October 1993	5
8 October 1993	5
15 October 1993	5
22 October 1993	8
29 October 1993	7
5 November 1993	8
12 November 1993	6
19 November 1993	5
26 November 1993	6
3 December 1993	6
10 December 1993	6
17 December 1993	5
24 December 1993	—
31 December 1993	—
7 January 1994	6
14 January 1994	6
21 January 1994	7
28 January 1994	5
4 February 1994	6
11 February 1994	6
18 February 1994	5
25 February 1994	7
4 March 1994	6
11 March 1994	5
18 March 1994	5
25 March 1994	5
1 April 1994	6
8 April 1994[2]	—
15 April 1994	8
22 April 1994	8
29 April 1994	6
6 May 1994	5
13 May 1994	5
20 May 1994	5

[1] Data were not collected during the Christmas and new year periods.
[2] Data received for week ending 8 April 1994 are not comparable to the other data.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the savings which would have accrued to the NHS if in the financial year 1992-93 all prescribable drugs that were out of patent had been generically prescribed.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not possible to quantify accurately the potential savings to the national health service because the price differentials between branded and generic drugs are subject to fluctuations, not all drugs that are out of patent have a generic equivalent and it is not always clinically appropriate to prescribe a generic drug.

Nursing Education

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority the numbers of entrants to initial pre-registration nursing education by course of study and by academic qualifications possessed by entrants in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Nurses and Midwives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority how many qualified NHS nurses and midwives, unqualified NHS nursing staff and nursing learners there were in each of the last five years; and what percentage each group was of the total NHS and midwifery staff in each year.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority the whole-time equivalent numbers of *(a)* agency and *(b)* bank nursing and midwifery staff employed in the national health service in each year for the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the tables.

The increase in bank nurses and midwives, together with the corresponding decrease in agency nurses and midwives, reflects the more widespread flexible working arrangements in the national health service for nurses and midwives.

Agency nurses by region
30 September 1988 to 1992
(Whole-time equivalent)

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Northern	—	—	[1]—	—	—
Yorkshire	180	160	120	110	110
Trent	30	150	10	130	90
East Anglia	190	190	280	240	200
North West Thames	1,160	1,540	1,080	710	430
North East Thames	1,750	1,530	1,190	910	680
South East Thames	1,200	1,250	1,000	430	170
South West Thames	740	1,000	950	520	280
Wessex	60	40	—	10	30
Oxford	90	100	230	180	190
South Western	80	190	150	70	100
West Midlands	290	410	1,150	370	540
Mersey	80	70	90	70	10
North Western	50	110	140	90	100
SHAs	330	500	320	90	300
Others	—	—	—	[1]—	—
ENGLAND	6,240	7,230	6,710	3,930	3,230

Bank nurses by region
30 September 1988 to 1992
(Whole-time equivalent)

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Northern	330	390	180	410	610
Yorkshire	200	210	220	270	320
Trent	240	220	460	490	760
East Anglia	320	400	470	490	600
North West Thames	420	510	480	590	610
North East Thames	670	460	510	950	1,400
South East Thames	620	590	630	720	840
South West Thames	590	690	630	1,050	990
Wessex	480	410	550	560	600
Oxford	320	310	390	730	550
South Western	450	540	490	780	1,260
West Midlands	410	450	430	500	500
Mersey	310	390	330	480	450
North Western	470	340	410	470	480
SHAs	[1]—	—	40	50	50
Others	—	—	—	—	—
ENGLAND	5,830	5,910	6,230	8,540	10,020

[1] Denotes figures of five and under and '—' denotes no staff.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalent.
2. 'Others' includes staff in other statutory authorities.
3. Some totals may not equal the sum of components due to rounding.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority the numbers of whole-time equivalent NHS nursing and midwifery staff employed on each grade and pay point of the clinical grades, educational grades, and senior nursing and midwifery pay spine in each year for the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Community Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many home helps are employed by each local authority responsible for community care; and what is the ratio of home helps to population in each authority.

Mr. Bowis: The latest available data relates to whole time equivalent directly employed home helps, excluding home help organisers and assistant organisers as at 30 September 1993 and will be placed in the Library.

Clinical Standards

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to include information on clinical effectiveness and performance in the patients charter.

Dr. Mawhinney: The patients charter already includes the right to be given a clear explanation of the proposed treatment, alternatives and risks. This is an essential part of ensuring that the right treatment is provided in the right way to the right patients, thus promoting clinical effectiveness.

Asset Sales

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make it her policy to require regional health authorities to disclose in their accounts receipts from *(a)* the disposal of hospitals and *(b)* other large asset sales;

(2) if he will list references concerning income from the sale of hospitals in the audited accounts of the regional health authorities from 1984 to date.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1991, total capital receipts are disclosed in the cash flow statement of the annual accounts of regional health authorities. This complies with the financial reporting standards issued by the Accounting Standards Board. Prior to 1991, income from the sale of capital assets was disclosed in the notes to the accounts of regional health authorities.

NHS Beds

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the total bed capacity of national health service providers is *(a)* unused and *(b)* used for private practice.

Mr. Sackville: Data about levels of occupancy of national health service beds are not held centrally. Information is held about the number of occupied bed days relating to each consultant episode. In total, there were over 45 million occupied bed days during 1991-92 in the general and acute sector in England. The number of bed days used by private patients is less than 1 per cent. of this total.

Child Care

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her response to the European Union's recommendation on child care.

Mr. Bowis: This relates to a requested response by March 1995.

Medical Consultants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority and by year for the last four years, the number of medical consultants per head of population; and how many of them worked in private practice.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table. The number of medical consultants who worked in private practice is not available centrally.

Hospital medical consultants by population in each region
England – 30 September 1992

	1989		1990		1991		1992	
	Whole-time equivalents	*Whole-time equivalents per 100,000 population*	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Whole-time equivalents per 100,000 population*	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Whole-time equivalents per 100,000 population*	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Whole-time equivalents per 100,000 population*
Northern	940	30·5	940	30·6	970	31·6	1,030	33·3
Yorkshire	1,020	28·3	970	26·5	1,000	27·3	1,130	30·6
Trent	1,200	25·7	1,230	26·2	1,250	26·7	1,330	28·2
East Anglia	580	28·4	630	30·6	650	31·4	630	29·9
North West Thames	940	27·0	1,040	29·9	1,060	30·3	960	27·0
North East Thames	1,180	31·2	1,240	32·8	1,240	32·5	1,340	35·7
South East Thames	1,100	30·0	1,130	31·0	1,170	31·8	1,170	31·6
South West Thames	780	26·4	820	27·7	850	28·4	820	26·9
Wessex	770	26·2	780	26·6	810	27·6	840	28·0
Oxford	660	26·1	670	26·5	690	26·7	710	27·4
South Western	820	25·3	850	26·0	870	26·7	900	27·0
West Midlands	1,410	27·2	1,460	27·9	1,500	28·7	1,530	29·1
Mersey	690	28·6	720	29·9	730	30·4	750	31·2
North Western	1,220	30·7	1,290	32·3	1,310	32·6	1,290	32·3

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed in the NHS in each year since 1990-91.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Hospital medical and dental consultants in England at 30 September (whole-time equivalent)

	Number
1990	14,590
1991	14,900
1992	15,290

Note: Figures rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalent.

Private Health Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department will commission an independent inquiry to establish the full costs of providing private health care within the NHS; including the costs of capital investment and training of medical staff.

Mr. Sackville: No.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date Mr. Graham Smith was informed that he was not to be reappointed as chairman of the Doncaster health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: Mr. Smith was told informally at the beginning of March that he was not being recommended for reappointment as chairman of Doncaster health authority. I wrote to Mr. Smith on 28 March notifying him formally that he had not been reappointed.

Air Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the adequacy of her Department's risk level assessment for soot particles of an average hourly concentration of 250 micrograms per cubic metre.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not set a risk level for soot particles. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of

State for the Environment's expert panel on air quality standards is currently considering a standard for particulates which will include soot particles. The possible health effects of particulates are under consideration by a sub-group of this Department's expert advisory Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her estimate of the health benefits of the reduction in air pollution to the safe levels defined by the World Health Organisation by the year 2000;

(2) what assessment she has made of the health implications of a delay of five years in the reduction of air pollution to the safe levels defined by the World Health Organisation.

Mr. Sackville: The World Health Organisation air quality guidelines were established to provide information on possible effects of air pollutants and as a basis for standard setting by individual countries. They were determined with a view to protecting sensitive individuals and include safety factors to account for variations in sensitivity between individuals. Modest excursions of air pollutants above the guidelines would not therefore be expected to have a large effect on health.

The assessment of the health effects of air pollution close to these levels remains uncertain. The Department's expert advisory committee on the medical effects of air pollutants has set up a sub-group to advise on the possible links between air pollutants and asthma and one to advise on the possible health effects of particulates including soot. The position will be reviewed in the light of its advice.

Targets

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will identify the second order priorities for the next round of the "The Health of the Nation" targets; and what consideration she has given to the inclusion of targets specifically relating to the need to reduce the incidence of heart failure as a discrete part of the coronary heart disease targets.

Mr. Sackville: There are no current plans for setting any new "The Health of the Nation" targets or key areas. The focus for the present is on consolidating work in the five existing key areas.

Almost all cases of heart failure are attributable either to coronary heart disease or hypertension, both of which have specific "The Health of the Nation" targets within the CHD/stroke key area. The prevention, early diagnosis and effective treatment of heart failure are subsumed within these existing targets.

GP Practices

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner practices there are in operation in each NHS region in England.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Region	*Number of practices*
Northern	523
Yorkshire	671
Trent	852
East Anglia	299
North West Thames	818
North East Thames	905
South East Thames	776
South West Thames	518
Wessex	442
Oxford	382
South Western	571
West Midlands	1,064
Mersey	442
North Western	879

The data relate to 1 October 1993.

Intensive Therapy Units

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive therapy units are in operation in each NHS region in England *(a)* in absolute numbers and *(b)* per head of population by region.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the table.

Region	*Number of intensive therapy units (ITU's)*[1]	*Population*[2] *per ITU*
Northern and Yorkshire	26	252,303
North West	30	219,673
Trent	16	294,031
West Midlands	20	260,960
Anglia/Oxford	13	355,607
North Thames	27	270,425
South Thames	13	510,530
South Western	24	246,625

[1] The number of intensive therapy units does not reflect accurately the level of provision as the number of beds in each unit varies considerably.

[2] Population figures based on 1990 Office of Population Censuses and Surveys data.

Dentistry

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dental deregistrations there were in the period 1985 to 1993;

(2) how many clients were registered with general dental practitioners in each year since 1983.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* Before the introduction of the new dental contract in October 1990, patients did not register with their dentists for treatment. Patients could not therefore be deregistered before that date. There were 687,765 deregistrations between 3 July 1992, the date deregistrations started to be counted, and 10 June 1994. Over a broadly similar period, total patient registrations rose by 1,049,178.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests and studies have been carried out by the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down using potassium; when these experiments were carried out; and what were the results and conclusions of these tests and studies.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Dr. Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what tests and studies have been carried out by the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down using potassium, when these experiments were carried out, and what were the results and conclusions of these tests and studies has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. Tests and studies on potassium, which is a highly reactive metal, have not been carried out at CBDE. Although potassium as a laboratory chemical has been used and continues to be used on an infrequent basis in various aspects of general organic chemical synthesis at CBDE Porton Down.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 26 January *Official Report*, columns *304-5*, (1) how many service volunteers on average return voluntarily to Porton Down to take part in subsequent unrelated studies; whether they receive the same pro rata payment as volunteers who go only once; and how many times a service volunteer may go to Porton Down to participate in studies;

(2) what details from the study are recorded on the medical records of individual service volunteers who have participated in studies at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down; what is his Department's policy on releasing the medical records of service volunteers to the individual concerned or to the individual's doctors if so requested; and how many medical records have been released in this way;

(3) how many service volunteers on average each year withdraw from studies at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down after the nature of the intended study is explained to them; and whether they still receive payment;

(4) how many service volunteers are on average each year recalled to have their medical health checked; how such volunteers are chosen to be recalled; how many years after the study they are usually recalled; and whether they are recalled more than once;

(5) how many service volunteers on average each year are rejected as being unfit following the medical examination on arrival at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down; and whether they still receive payment if they are rejected.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establisment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his answer of 26 January, Official Report, columns 304-5, further questions relating to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment volunteer programme have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures;

(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Service volunteers re-attend CBDE to take part in further studies according to their willingness and availability and are paid the same as volunteers who may only attend on one occasion. There is no restriction on the number of times a volunteer may return to CBDE to participate in studies but a volunteer cannot re-attend to participate in the same study for scientific and statistical reasons. Volunteers are paid to compensate them for the inconvenience of the tests carried out as part of the study; there is no difference in the amount of the payment for volunteers who have returned for a further study.

4. It has long been MOD policy to release Service volunteers' medical records to a patient's GP on a MEDICAL-IN-CONFIDENCE basis when they are needed for the management of a particular case. It is entirely up to the GP how much or how little of this information he conveys to his patient. The Service volunteer's medical documents will include the results of the investigations performed as part of the entry medical examination. There are no central records maintained of how many medical records have been released in such circumstances.

5. Over the past three years, only one volunteer has withdrawn from a study following detailed explanation of the protocol. He received payment in compensation for the inconvenience of the tests he had undertaken during the entry medical examination.

6. There is no set pattern of recalls or selection of volunteers for recall. The number of volunteers recalled and the time after the study are varied according to the objective of recalling the volunteers. The current practice is that all volunteers upon arrival at the Establishment are read a lay statement by a military officer which states that it is our policy to call back some volunteer subjects for re-testing from time to time to ensure that the techniques used give consistent and reproducible results and that no changes in the way we apply the tests have occurred with time." The recall of any volunteers to CBDE is recorded on their medical records.

7. About 5% of volunteers are rejected following review of their medical documents prior to their attendance at CBDE. They receive no payment. Between 5-10% of volunteers are rejected as unfit following the entry medical examination upon arrival at CBDE. They will receive payments in compensation for the inconvenience of the tests undertaken as part of the initial medical examination.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *163-64*, (1) what was the purpose of experiments carried out on the nerve agent VX during the specified years at Nancekuke; what was the conclusion of these experiments; what quantities of the agent VX were used in these tests; when the results of these experiments were exchanged with the United States of America; with which other countries these results were shared; and under which defence agreements this information was exchanged;

(2) on which agents in the V series Nancekuke carried out research in the specified years; what was the purpose and conclusions of this research; when the results of these experiments were exchanged with the United States of America; and under which defence agreements this information was exchanged.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 11th January, Official Report, columns 163-4 for further information about the nerve agent VX and the V series research carried out at Nancekuke have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The studies on VX during 1957-1976 were to determine whether or not this agent was producible in quantity and was stable when stored. Our records do not indicate the amount of VX but it is estimated to be less than 100 kgs.

4. The V series agents were substituted analogues of VX. The V series agents were investigated to determine whether they were stable and whether they could be produced effectively by an aggressor.

5. The results of this work have formed part of the chemical and biological defence programme and is part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Cooperation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what precautions are taken to ascertain whether individual service personnel have allergies before they are tested in the human volunteer programme at the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down;

(2) how long is the average stay for service volunteers who are involved in studies at the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down; how much payment each service volunteer receives; and how many tests each individual undergoes on average.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what precautions are taken to ascertain whether individual Service personnel have allergies before they participated in the human volunteer programme and how long is the average stay for Service volunteers who are involved in studies at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down; how much payment each Service volunteer receives; and how many tests each individual undergoes on average have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. In order to ascertain whether individual Service personnel have allergies before they are tested in the human volunteer programme their Service medical documents are reviewed at CBDE before the volunteers attend for studies. No volunteer is accepted for studies at CBDE with a medical history suggesting allergic response to any substance. A recent, positive history of hay fever, asthma, eczema or other allergic phenomenon will lead to rejection at the initial medical examination, despite the fact that this may not be directly relevant to the study, or substances being used in the study being performed. Evidence or allergic response found at the initial medical examination, such as urticaria, or respiratory function tests suggesting an allergic airway response (asthma) will also lead to automatic rejection.

4. Service volunteers may remain at CBDE for between three days to four weeks depending on the study protocol in which they are participating. The majority of recent and current protocols involve a two or three week stay. Payment for the inconvenience associated with the tests in a study will vary according to the number of tests undertaken which may vary between about a minimum of 100 to a maximum of approximately 400; a payment is made for each test. The minimum amount presently paid is £142 after tax whereas the maximum is £350 after tax.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *306*, what was the conclusion of the Biotechnology Committee's report into the implications of biotechnology for defence; how many members were then serving on the Biotechnology Committee; how many of them were academics; whether they were given access to the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 26th January, Official Report, column 306, what was the conclusion of the Biotechnology Committee's report into the implications of biotechnology for defence; how many members were then serving on the Biotechnology Committee; how many of them were academics; whether they were given access to the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Biotechnology Committee considered the impact that biotechnology would have on the threat from biological weapons and the ways in which this technology could be harnessed to enhance the United Kingdom's defence capability to detect and provide medical countermeasures against biological agents. The Biotechnology Committee consisted of 14 members of which 7 were from academia. They were given access to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down and to relevant documentation in order to carry out their task. Their report is classified and as such I am unable to arrange to place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official*

Report, column *163*, (1) how many service volunteers were used for tests at Porton Down in each year between 1964 and 1979; what was the purpose of those tests; and which chemicals and biological organisms were used in those tests;

(2) what were the reasons for the increases in the number of tests on service volunteers in 1980 and 1981; why only GB (Sarin) has been used in the tests since 1979; and what were the highest and lowest amounts of this agent used in these tests.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 11 January, Official Report, column 163, asking how many volunteers were used for tests at Porton Down each year between 1964 and 1979 and the reasons for the increases in the number of tests in Service volunteers in 1980 and 1981 and why only GB (Sarin) has been used since 1979 have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,
(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and
(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The number of Service volunteers used for studies at Porton Down in each year between 1964 and 1979 was as follows:

	Number
1964	298
1965	146
1966	149
1967	244
1968	263
1969	181
1970	327
1971	225
1972	358
1973	264
1974	304
1975	137
1976	254
1977	117
1978	104
1979	153

These volunteers have participated in studies carried out for the purposes outlined in paragraph 2 above. No volunteer studies have been carried out involving biological organisms.

4. The number of Service volunteers increased in 1980 and 1981 because of the need to carry out studies into aircrew protection. A number of studies were carried out to determine the lowest acceptable level for exposure to nerve agents.

5. GB (Sarin) is an example of a volatile nerve agent which has been used in all studies involving nerve agents since 1979. This agent has been used as it is representative of the range of nerve agents.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *165-66*, which of the studies on nerve gases, CR gas and CS gas were carried out in Australia; at which Australian defence establishment these tests were done; what was the purpose and conclusion of these tests; and in which years these tests were carried out.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 11th January, Official Report, columns 165-6, which of the studies on nerve gases, CR gas and CS gas were carried out in Australia, at which Australian defence establishment these test were done; what was the purpose and conclusion of these tests; and in which years these tests were carried out has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. In this work it has been necessary to evaluate the potential hazards from nerve gases and the irritants CR and CS. Our records do not indicate that any of our work on these materials has been carried out in Australia.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *303*, (1) at which military establishments studies for the human volunteer programme have taken place other than the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down; when and for what reasons these studies were conducted at Porton Down; and what was the conclusion of these studies;

(2) when the detailed protocol was approved by the independent ethics committee and adopted by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and if he will publish this protocol covering the testing of volunteers.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer of 26 January, Official Response, column 303, when the detailed protocol was approved by the Independent Ethics Committee and adopted by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and if he will publish this protocol covering the testing of volunteers and at which military establishments studies for the human volunteer programme have taken place other than the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down; when and for what reasons these studies were conducted at Porton Down; and

what was the conclusion of these studies have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,
(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and
(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. A separate detailed protocol is prepared for each study; these are classified and are not published.

4. Our records indicate that studies involving Service volunteers have also taken place at RMCS Shrivenham, Dover, Bulford, The Cambridge Military Hospital and some collaborative work has been carried out with the Institute of Aviation Medicine. Such studies are carried out at these other Establishments when it is more convenient to do the studies there than to require the volunteers to come to Porton Down.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests and studies have been carried out by Porton Down to assess the so-called pepper sprays; when these tests and experiments were carried out; whether they involved humans and animals; what were the conclusions of these studies; when the results of these studies and tests were exchanged with other United Kingdom Government Departments and other countries; and with which other countries and United Kingdom Government Departments these results were shared.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what tests and studies have been carried out by Porton Down to assess the so-called pepper sprays; when these tests and experiments were carried out, whether they involved humans and animals; what were the conclusions of these studies; when the results of these studies and tests were exchanged and other United Kingdom government departments and other countries; and with which other countries and United Kingdom government departments these results were shared has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records indicate that no tests or studies have been carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to assess so-called pepper sprays. We are aware that the active material in the so-called pepper sprays devices is capsaicin; this was studied by CBDE in the 1920s as a possible incapacitating agent. Our records do not indicate what detailed work was done with capsaicin.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department last negotiated with the United States of America to supply Britain with a shipment of nerve gas; what prompted the negotiations; and what were the conclusions of the negotiations.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when his Department last negotiated with the United States of America to supply Britain with a shipment of nerve gas; what prompted the negotiations; and what were the conclusions of the negotiation has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records indicate that the last transfer of nerve gas from the United States of America to Britain took place in June 1967 and was transported to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down. Our records do not indicate precisely when the negotiations took place but they are likely to have been in the course of the regular trilateral and quadlateral discussions with the US on chemical and biological defence, and to have taken place shortly before the transfer in 1967. The negotiations which led to this transfer took place to enable a collaborative programme of work into the stability and analytical research of nerve agents to be carried out. The results of this work was part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would therefore be part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Co-operation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many staff at the Chemical and Biological Warfare Establishment at Porton Down have been permanently disabled since 1964 due to work-related activity; in which year each occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each one; and what was the establishment's response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such cases;

(2) how many staff at the Chemical and Biological Warfare Establishment at Porton Down have died due to work-related activity since 1964; in which year each death occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each death; and what was the establishment's response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such deaths.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many staff at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have died or been permanently disabled due to work-related activities since 1964; in which year each death occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each death; and what was the Establishment's

response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such deaths has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. Our records indicate that no members of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment staff have died or been permanently disabled due to a work related activity since 1964.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *397*, with which other countries the results of the tests on tryptamines were shared; when these results were shared and through which defence agreement they were exchanged; which animals were tested with tryptamines; how many of each of these animals were used; and when Porton Down ended its work on tryptamines.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer to 27th January, Official Report, column 397-8, with which other countries the results of the tests on tryptamines were shared; when these results were shared and through which defence agreement they were exchanged; which animals were tested with tryptamines; how many of each of these animals were used; and when Porton Down ended its work on tryptamines has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records do not indicate precisely how many small laboratory animals were used in this work but they are likely to have involved rats, mice, rabbits and monkeys. The work involving tryptamines ceased in the mid 1960s and the results of this work was part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would therefore be part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Co-operation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down has done to assess the threat of genetically engineered toxins; what was the conclusion of the work; which toxins have been studied; what tests and studies have been involved in this work; which section of the establishment has been carrying out the work; whether the results have been published in open literature; and whether the results have been exchanged with any other country.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down has done to assess the threat of genetically-engineered toxins; what was the conclusion of the work; which toxins have been studied; what tests and studies have been involved in this work; which section of the Establishment has been carrying out the work; whether the results have been published in open literature; and whether the results have been exchanged with any other country has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Theoretical reviews have been carried out to evaluate the threat from genetically engineered toxins by the Defence Microbiology Division in conjunction with appropriate sections of the Establishment. The results are classified and have not been published in the open literature. In addition genetic engineering has been used as a tool in work to study medical countermeasures to toxins by, for example, detoxifying toxins in order to produce safer vaccines. This work was part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would therefore be part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Co-operation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), on 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *163-64*, what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GD during the years outlined at Nancekuke; what was the conclusion of this research; what quantities of the nerve agent were used in this research; with which other countries the results of this research were shared and under which defence agreement this occurred.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him pursuant to his Answer to the honourable Member for Brent East on 11th January, Official Report, columns 163-64, what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GD during the years outlined at Nancekuke; what was the conclusion of this research, what quantities of the nerve agent was used in this research; with which other countries the results of this research were shared and under which defence agreement this occurred has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out work on the nerve agent GD to evaluate the feasibility and hazard of the use of such an agent against the UK Armed Forces. The work enabled assessments to be made of the ease of

acquisition of the precursors for GD, the case of stabilisation of GD and the shelf life of thickened GD. The quantity used was about 60 kg.

4. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Co-operation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when female service personnel have taken part in tests under the human volunteer programme at Porton Down;

(2) how many service personnel have died while taking part in the human volunteer programme run by the Chemical and Biological Warfare Establishment at Porton Down since 1964; in which year each death occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each death; and what was the establishment's response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such deaths;

(3) how many service personnel have been involved in accidents requiring hospital treatment while or after taking part in the human volunteer programme run by the Chemical and Biological Warfare Establishment at Porton Down since 1964; in which year each accident occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each accident; and what was the establishment's response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such accidents.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how many service personnel have been involved in accidents requiring hospital treatment while or after taking part in the human volunteer programme run by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1964; in which year each accident occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each accident; and what was the Establishment's response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such accidents, how many service personnel have died while taking part in the human volunteer programme run by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1964; in which year each death occurred; what were the causes and circumstances of each death; and what was the Establishment's response in terms of changing procedures to prevent such deaths and when female service personnel have taken part in tests under the human volunteer programme at Porton Down have been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,
(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and
(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Our records indicate that no Service personnel since 1964 have been involved in accidents requiring hospital treatment or have died while or after taking part in the human volunteer programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

Female Service personnel have been invited to participate in the human volunteer programme since May 1972 and first participated in the volunteer programme in November 1972.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work Porton Down has carried out to assess substituted hydroxylamines and hydrazines as an incapacitating agent; when this work started and ended; what was the conclusion of this work; which and how many animals were involved in this work; if the tests involved humans; with which other countries the results of the work were shared; when this information was shared; and under which defence agreement these results were exchanged.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what work Porton Down has carried out to assess substituted hydroxylamines and hydrazines as an incapacitating agent; when this work started and ended; what was the conclusion of this work; which and how many animals were involved in this work; if the tests involved humans; with which other countries the results of the work were shared; when this information was shared; and under which defence agreement these results were exchanged has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records indicate that no work has been carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to assess substituted and unsubstituted hydroxylamines and hydrazines as incapacitating agents.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *160*, where the results of the work on pyrroles were published in open literature.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer to the hon. Member for Brent East on 11th January, *Official Report*, column *160*, where the results of the work on pyrroles were published in open literature has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Proces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential

hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records indicate that the results of the work on pyrroles carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has not been published in the open literature.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on 11 January, *Official Report*, column *167*, why Australia requested each of the agents and materials from Britain; from which British military establishment each was transferred; to which Australian establishment each was transferred; how each was transported and what safety precautions were required; and what was the nature of the V agent and G agent intermediates.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 11 January, Official Report, column 167, why Australia requested each of the agents and materials from Britain; from which British military establishment each was transferred; to which Australian establishment each was transferred; how each was transported and what safety precautions were required; and what was the nature of the V agent and G agent intermediates has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The V agent intermediate was methyphosphonodichloride and the G agent intermediate was Di-Di which is a mixture of methylphosphonic difluoride and methylphosphonic dichloride. These were transferred from the then Chemical Defence Establishment at Nancekuke. Our records do not indicate why Australia requested the agents and materials from Britain or how they were transported to Australia. They were, however, transported to London, suitably packaged in accordance with the safety standards applicable at that time, for onward transportation to Australia.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) of 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *164-65*, what work Porton Down has also done on assessing the hazard of tremorines; when this work started and ended, what was the conclusion of the work; where were the conclusions published; and with which other countries the results of the work were shared and when this information was exchanged.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24th June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer to the honourable Member for Brent East of 11th January, *Official Report*, column *164-5*, what work Porton Down has also done on assessing the hazard of tremorines; when this work started and ended, what was the conclusion of the work; where were the conclusions published; and with which other countries the results of the work were shared and when this information was exchanged has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. In my reply of 11 January I advised the honourable Member for Brent East that the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment had carried out work on oxo-tremorine. Our records indicate that we have not carried out work on tremorines as such although pyrroles are substituted tremorines and my answers of 11 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *160* and 19 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *82* relate to pyrroles.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research projects relating to genetic engineering have been funded in universities and polytechnics by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1979; what are the titles of these projects and what was the duration and value of each project.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many research projects relating to genetic engineering have been funded in universities and polytechnics by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1979, what are the titles of these projects and what was the duration and value of each project has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. A total of seven research projects relating to genetic engineering have been funded in universities and polytechnics by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1979. The details are as follows:

Title	*Duration*
Gene probes for flaviruses	3 years
Plasmid stability in bacillus	3 years
Genetic control of translational fidelity in yeast	3 years
Eukaryotic expression vectors	3½ years
Mapping of bacterial proteins	4 years
Bacillus brevis for biosynthesis of heterogeneous proteins	3 years

3. The total value of these contracts was £1,059K; it is not our normal practice to reveal the value of individual contracts as the disclosure of the value is left to the individual universities and polytechnics to make as they feel appropriate.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which years Porton Down has tested *(a)* CR gas and *(b)* CS gas on service personnel in the human volunteer programme; what was the purpose of these tests; how the gas was administered to the volunteers in both cases; what was the conclusion of these tests for each of the gases; how many service volunteers were tested with each of the gases; and where the results of these tests are published in open literature.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking in which years Porton Down has tested (a) CR gas and (b) CS gas on service personnel in the human volunteer programme; what was the purpose of these tests; how the gas was administered to the volunteers in both cases; what was the conclusions of these tests for each of the gases; how many service volunteers were tested with each of the gases; and where the results of these tests are published in open literature has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,
(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and
(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Our records indicate that 460 Service volunteers were exposed to the irritant CS during the period 1959-1973 and 190 Service volunteers were exposed to CR during the period 1963-1976.

4. The purpose was to carry out skin and eye sensitivity tests, food palatability tests, physiological tests to determine the effects on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems and exercise testing to determine the degree of incapacitation following exposure. The CS and CR was administered in controlled amounts in an exposure chamber or to the skin in the form of a solution.

5. Our records indicate that the results of the human volunteer programme involving CS and CR have been published in the open literature as listed in the Annex.

Open Literature Publications

The presentation and management of individuals contaminated with solutions of dibenzoxazepine (CR).
Ballantyne, B., Beswick, F. W. and Price Thomas, D.
Medicine, Science and the Law, *13*, No. 4, October 1973.

The cutaneous reactions produced by dibenzoxazepine (CR).
Holland, P.
Brit. J. Derm (1974), *90, 657-659.*

Effects on man of whole body drenches with dilute solutions of c-chlorobenzilidene malononitrile (CS) and dibenzoxazepine (CR).
Ballantyne B, Gazzard M. F., Swanston D. W. and Williams P.
Arch. Toxicol 34 183-201 (1975).

Riot control agents. Biomedical and health aspects of the use of chemicals in civil disturbances.
Ballantyne B.
Medical annual 1977.

Report of the enquiry into the Medical and Toxicological aspects of CS orthochlorobenzylidene malononitrile. Part I. Enquiry into the medical situation following the use of CS in Londonderry on 13th and 14th August 1969.
Himsworth Committee. October 1969. HMSO Cmnd 4173.

Report of the enquiry into the Medical and Toxicological aspects of CS, Part II. Enquiry into Toxicological aspects of CS and its uses for civil purposes.
Himsworth Committee. September 1971. HMSO Cmnd 4775.

The effect of CS aerosol upon exercise, ventilation and cardiac frequency in healthy men.
Cotes J. E., Evans L. R., Johnson G., Martin H. de V. and Reed J. W.
J. Physiol, 222, 77-78, 1972.

Effect of CS aerosol upon Lung Gas Transfer and Alveolar Volume in Healthy Men.
Cotes J. E., Dabbs J. H., Evans M. R. and Holland P.
Q.JI. exp Physiol. (1972), *57*, 199-206.

The cutaneous reactions produced by o-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile and w-chloracetonphenone when applied directly to the skin of human subjects.
Holland P., and White R. G.
Br J. Derm (1972), *86*, 150.

The palatability of food exposed to o-chlorobenzylidene malononitirile (CS).
Kemp, K. H. and Wilder W. B.
Medicine, Science and the Law, *12* No. 2, April 1972

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work Porton Down has carried out to assess benzimidazoles as an incapacitating agent; when this work started and ended; what was the conclusion of the work; which and how many animals were tested during this work; how many service volunteers were tested; and where the results of the work were published in open literature.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under their framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what work Porton Down has carried out to assess benzimidazoles as an incapacitating agent; when this work started and ended; what was the conclusion of the work; which and how many animals were tested during this work; how many service volunteers were tested; and where the results of the work were published in open literature has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. We have no record of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment having carried out work on benzimidazoles as an incapacitating agent.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the numbers of staff and budget of the defence microbiology division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has increased or decreased since the division was set up;

(2) what publications have been published by scientists in the defence microbiology division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1986; in which scientific journals they were published; and on what date they were published;

(3) what are the current priorities of the defence microbiology division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, under its framework

document. I have asked the chief executive, to write to the hon. Member. There is also an annex listing research publications by scientists in the defence microbiology division, which will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what are the current priorities of the Defence Microbiology Division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, whether the numbers of staff and budget of the Defence Microbiology Division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has increased or decreased since the division was set up, what publications have been published by scientists in the Defence Microbiology Division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1986; in which scientific journals they were published; and on what date they were published have been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The primary purpose of the Defence Microbiology Division at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down is to carry out work on defence against pathogenic micro-organisms and toxins that are assessed to present a threat to the United Kingdom Armed Forces. The work of this division contributes to the United Kingdom programme on chemical and biological defence which is aimed at ensuring that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The current priorities of the Defence Microbiology Division are to investigate technologies for the rapid detection and identification of biological warfare agents and to investigate medical countermeasures against their use.

4. Since its establishment in 1979 the numbers of staff and budget of the Defence Microbiology Division have increased. Our records indicate that the research publications by scientists in the Defence Microbiology Division since 1986 are listed in the Annex.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the relationship between his answer of 29 March, *Official Report*, columns *732-33*, and his oral statement of 27 January, *Official Report*, column 444, regarding his visiting South Yorkshire.

Mr. Hanley: There seems to have been an error in the *Official Report* at column 444. As the hon. Member has been informed subsequently on a number of occasions, my visit of 27 January was to North Yorkshire.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations, aircraft types involved, altitude and determination of cause, for all category C air misses involving military aircraft over the United Kingdom in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Hanley: I will arrange for a copy of the list of all category C air miss reports involving military aircraft over the United Kingdom in 1988 and 1989, which have been investigated by the joint air miss working group to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the action taken in response to the joint air miss working group recommendations in its report on air miss No. 46/93.

Mr. Hanley: The national air traffic services in conjunction with the appropriate MOD staffs have taken the requisite actions called for by the joint air miss working group in its recommendations. No discrepancies or inaccuracies were found in the United Kingdom and NATO airborne early warning [illegible].

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library brief descriptions of the circumstances of all category A air misses involving military aircraft for each year since 1989.

Mr. Hanley: Lists of all categories of air misses involving military aircraft since 1988 have recently been placed in the Library of the House. Since that time, there have been a further three category A air misses, details of which will be placed in the Library shortly. The lists detail the date, location, risk category, aircraft type and descriptions of the cause.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the category A air miss 159/93 on 2 November 1993 between a Jet Ranger 206 helicopter and an RAF Tornado, *(b)* the category B air miss 148/93 on 18 October 1993 between a Jet Ranger 206 helicopter and an RAF Tucano and *(c)* the category C air miss 151/93 on 12 October 1993 between a Jet Ranger 206 helicopter and an RAF Tornado.

Mr. Hanley: All reported air misses are investigated by the joint air miss working group—JAWG. The reports of the investigations into these three incidents will be included in the next JAWG "Analysis of Airmisses in the UK" due to be published in the autumn. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House in the usual way.

Royal Air Force (Bosnia)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current interval between assignments to duties over Bosnia for Royal Air Force airborne warning and communication system crews; and what deferments of AWACS crew training tasks have taken place as a result of meeting commitments to providing crews for Bosnian operations;

(2) what are the current *(a)* planned and *(b)* actual intervals between deployments for operational duties over Bosnia, northern Iraq and southern Iraq, for individual members of aircrew in *(a)* Tornado GR1/1A squadrons, *(b)* Tornado F3 squadrons, *(c)* Harrier squadrons, *(d)* Jaguar squadrons and *(e)* Royal Navy Sea Harrier squadrons; and for what period of time aircrew are assigned to these duties on each occasion.

Mr. Hanley: Intervals between deployments of aircrew overseas for operations related to former Yugoslavia and Iraq vary for a variety of reasons. On the assumption that the present pattern of deployments continues unchanged, the number of deployments overseas and the time spent on operational duty by individual RAF aircrew in a full year would on average be of the following order:

Aircraft/Theatre	*Average number in a full year of*	
	Deployments	*Weeks spent on operational duties*
E-3D: former Yugoslavia	8	16
Tornado GR1/1A: Iraq	0·5	3
Tornado F3: former Yugoslavia	0·67	8

Aircraft/Theatre	Average number in a full year of: Deployments	Weeks spent on operational duties
Harrier: Iraq	1·33	8
Jaguar: former Yugoslavia	2	16

Royal Navy aircrew flying the Sea Harrier for former Yugoslavia operations deploy to the Adriatic with their ship for about six months at a time. Individuals would not spend the whole of this period on operations, and could expect there to be at least six months between deployments.

The E-3D force is able to meet its operational commitments and although essential crew training is being achieved, the period for initial crew familiarisation has increased.

Night Vision Goggles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of disorientation have been reported by aircrew flying with night vision goggles since this equipment was first employed, in each of the flying services.

Mr. Hanley: There has been one reported incident, involving an Army Air Corps helicopter, attributable to aircrew disorientation when wearing night vision goggles.

Air Exercises

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles, dates and locations of planned major air exercises over the United Kingdom for the remainder of 1994.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Exercise Title	Date	Location
Highland Cardinal	4-8 July 1994	Mid Wales
Welsh Cleric	11-15 July 1994	Mid Wales
Brilliant Foil	3-7 October 1994	All of United Kingdom mainland
Green Blade	3-11 November 1994	South of Scotland and Borders

Tornado

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date of the incident in which a Royal Air Force Tornado suffered an engine fire on take-off from Canadian air forces base Goose bay in 1993; what was the damage to the aircraft; where the repairs were undertaken; and what was the cause of the accident.

Mr. Hanley: The incident occurred on 20 July 1993. The aircraft was repaired at Goose bay after sustaining heat damage to the engines, rudder and one taileron. The cause of the incident was a servicing error during replacement of the right engine reheat fuel control unit.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost per flying hour, including apportionment of fixed costs, of flying the Tornado GR1 aircraft *(a)* from RAF Bruggen and *(b)* from bases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hanley: Fixed costs are spread over four squadrons in the case of RAF Bruggen and two in the case of United Kingdom bases. At 1993-94 prices, the average cost per flying hour of a Torndado GR1, operated from *(a)* RAF Bruggen is £18,952 and *(b)* United Kingdom bases is £21,673. These figures include fixed costs and those relating to depreciation, interest on capital and administration.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what annual number of flying hours per member of *(a)* Tornado GR1, *(b)* Tornado F3, *(c)* Jaguar and *(d)* Harrier aircrew was provided for in Royal Air Force fuel allocations for each financial year since 1990-91.

Mr. Hanley: The average number of flying hours expected to be flown by each Tornado GR1, Tornado F3, Jaguar and Harrier aircrew member in 1990-91 and 1991-92 was 240 hours. In financial years 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 the forecast average was 222 hours. Those flying hours were provided for in the Royal Air Force fuel allocations for the years concerned.

HMS Valiant

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the result of the tests carried out on 11 May on the Royal Navy crew of HMS Valiant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The results of the tests carried out on a representative number of the crew of HMS Valiant on 11 May showed no abnormalities.

NATO Peacekeeping Manual

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the academic bodies consulted in the preparation of NATO's new manual on peacekeeping.

Mr. Hanley: Two NATO documents on peace support operations are in preparation. Academic bodies have not been consulted as part of this process.

Low flying

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of low flying sorties carried out by Germany-based aircraft of No. 2 Group in 1993 in *(a)* German airspace, *(b)* the United Kingdom low flying system and *(c)* elsewhere.

Mr. Hanley: Aircraft of No. 2 group RAF strike command flew 5,228 sorties in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1993. The upper limit for low flying in German airspace is 1,500 feet. However for the purposes of statistical consistency No. 2 group now apply the United Kingdom upper limit of 2,000 feet when maintaining low flying records. Such records cover fast jet aircraft only. The number of sorties flown in Germany and elsewhere during 1993 were as follows:

	Fast jet sorties below 2,000 feet
Germany	2,229
Elsewhere	1,070

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances

of the unauthorised flight in the United Kingdom low flying system of three F-16s of the royal Danish air force on 14 December 1993.

Mr. Hanley: The aircraft had been deployed to RAF Leuchars to carry out low flying training. On their return flight to Denmark they flew at low level without authorisation and breached an avoidance area. Details of the incident have been passed to the royal Danish air force for appropriate action.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about alleged low flying incidents occurring *(a)* in mid-Wales *(b)* in the whole of Wales and *(c)* throughout the United Kingdom he has received during each year since 1991 and in the current year to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The number of inquiries or complaints relating to military low flying which my Department received in each year since 1991 to May 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, from addresses in the county of Powys, Wales and the United Kingdom are as follows:

Year	*Powys*	*Wales*	*United Kingdom*
1991	108	791	4,846
1992	199	904	6,295
1993	110	556	5,738
[1]1994	31	161	1,716

[1] Up to 31 May 1994.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the first low-level overland training area for air defence aircraft was established; what facilities these areas are designed to provide which were not previously available to air defence units: if he will list the locations of each such area in the United Kingdom, together with their height limits, hours of operation and arrangements for limits on aircraft numbers and for deconfliction from other air traffic; and if he will place in the Library a map showing the location and extent of the low-level overland training areas.

Mr. Hanley: The low-level operational training area —LOTA—system was established on 3 April 1992 in order to provide better co-ordination between air defence aircraft engaged in low level intercept training and offensive aircraft using the United Kingdom low flying system. The system does not provide for any form of training not previously available but allows aircrew to register their intention to train in a specific LOTA. This facilitates co-ordination of sorties and thereby enhances training opportunities. LOTAs are not subject to special regulations, but any military flying below 2,000 feet within them is subject to the normal regulations of the United Kingdom low flying system. There are seven LOTAs; I am arranging for a map showing their location to be placed in the Library of the House.

Eurofighter

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum runway length necessary at any base to be used regularly by the Eurofighter aircraft.

Mr. Aitken: It is not our practice to release operational information.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where he proposes pilot training for the Eurofighter aircraft will take place.

Mr. Hanley: A decision on the location of Eurofighter 2000 pilot training has not yet been taken.

Training Areas

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the *(a)* statutory requirements and *(b)* requirements set out in service orders for the operating authorities of military firing ranges and training areas to report infringements of danger area airspace.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to her answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *441*, how the percentage of United Kingdom herds with adult breeding cattle that had experienced at least one case of BSE, as given in "Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy in Great Britain, A Progress Report", published by her Department in March 1994, was calculated; and if she will give the percentage for the latest available date.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The figure in the progress report is for Great Britain, not the United Kingdom, and is the best estimate available using information collected by the state veterinary service about confirmed cases of BSE and agricultural census data.

The percentage of herds that have experienced BSE is calculated by using data from the agricultural census on the number of holdings with dairy cows plus the number of holdings with beef cows as the denominator. This introduces a small error as those holdings with both dairy and beef cows will be counted twice. Those categories will also include some holdings with non-adult animals intended for breeding but not separately identifiable. As the agricultural census collects data on "holdings" only—rather than herds—and information on BSE database relates to "herds", counting of some holdings twice is considered to give the most accurate estimate for the denominator, particularly as each holding may comprise two or more herds.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is *(a)* the amount of land in hectares, *(b)* the number of farmers and *(c)* the cost of the five year set-aside scheme in (i) 1993-94 and (ii) 1994-95; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Payments to farmers in England under the five-year set-aside scheme for the financial year 1993-94 were some £20·7 million. Those payments relate primarily to land set-aside during the scheme year October 1992 to September 1994 under 3,360 agreements covering some 112,000 hectares. Estimated expenditure for 1994-95 is £14·1 million in respect of 2,130 agreements for the 1993-94 scheme year covering some 72,000 hectares. The reduction is the result of some farmers completing their

five-year agreements and others taking advantage of the option to terminate early in order to join the arable area payments scheme.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been paid out under the arable area payments scheme in *(a)* each county and *(b)* each region for linseed in 1993-94; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: No arable area payments have yet been made in respect of the 1993-94 scheme year.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to her answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *636*, concerning the amounts paid out under the arable area payments scheme in 1993-94, whether these figures included payments for linseed; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: No. Those figures related to the 1992-93 scheme year. Linseed was not incorporated into the arable area payments scheme until 1993.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the benefit to consumers in the United Kingdom of the 1992 CAP reform agreement; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: At the time of the CAP reform agreement, it was estimated that, when the reform is fully implemented, the annual costs imposed by the CAP on consumers should be around £8 billion lower for the EC as a whole, and around £1 billion lower for the United Kingdom.

Regional Service Centres

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the counties served, the number of hectares and the number of farmers in each of her Ministry's regional service centres; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The information requested in respect of the Ministry's nine regional service centres is set out in the table.

June 1993 census of agriculture and horticulture England[1]

Regional service centre location and counties covered	*Total agricultural area (Hectares)*	*Farmers/ partners/ directors*[2] *(Numbers)*
Bristol		
Avon	83,583	2,246
Dorset	198,653	3,412
Somerset	274,254	6,360
Wiltshire	269,449	3,360
Total	825,939	15,378
Cambridge		
Bedfordshire	91,160	1,450
Cambridgeshire	285,670	4,046
Essex	266,916	4,347
Hertfordshire	104,892	1,478
Norfolk	429,960	5,864
Suffolk	305,843	4,205
Total	1,484,441	21,390
Carlisle		
Cumbria	461,185	7,755
Lancashire	221,226	6,441
Northumberland	382,262	2,925
Tyne and Wear	15,442	305
Total	1,080,115	17,426
Crewe		
Cheshire	168,502	5,003
Merseyside	19,659	596
Greater Manchester	41,074	1,624
Shropshire	286,821	5,742
Staffordshire	197,155	5,130
Total	713,211	18,095
Exeter		
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	279,894	7,758
Devon	520,312	12,681
Total	800,206	20,439
Nottingham		
Derbyshire	186,673	4,458
Leicestershire	197,275	3,307
Lincolnshire	522,994	7,334
Northamptonshire	189,569	2,361
Nottinghamshire	152,207	2,459
Total	1,248,718	19,911
Northallerton		
Cleveland	29,328	528
Durham	158,136	2,664
Humberside	287,186	4,507
Yorkshire		
North	637,075	10,621
South	83,235	1,714
West	103,002	3,401
Total	1,297,962	23,435
Reading		
Berkshire	70,783	829
Buckinghamshire	127,194	2,131
East Sussex	112,163	2,435
Hampshire	227,278	3,267
Isle of Wight	26,494	567
Kent	249,406	4,694
Greater London	14,413	492
Oxfordshire	203,870	2,314
Surrey	68,918	1,810
West Sussex	126,183	2,335
Total	1,226,702	20,874
Worcester		
Hereford and Worcester	313,880	7,691
Gloucestershire	208,250	3,674
Warwickshire	156,186	2,817
West Midlands MC	15,602	520
Total	693,918	14,702
Total for 9 regional service centres	9,371,212	171,650

[1]Excluding estimates for minor holdings.
[2]Excludes spouses of farmers, partners and directors though they themselves may be partners or directors.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Luxembourg from 20 to 23 June; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This meeting of the Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, had a full discussion over four days of the Commission's proposals for farm support prices for 1994-95 and related measures. In the early hours of the final day, the Presidency tabled a final compromise the costs of which were assessed by the Commission to be at the limit of the funds available. Despite this, several member states regrettably continued to press for further measures involving additional expenditure. When the Presidency called a vote Germany, France and Luxembourg rejected the package as a whole and several others objected to parts of it. The proposals were accordingly not adopted and it now falls to the German Presidency to try to break the impasse.

The Council also discussed a proposal concerning the welfare of animals in transit. Along with Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Denmark, I expressed concern that, although the proposal contained significant improvements over the present rules, including a strengthening of enforcement, it failed to go far enough. As a result of our pressure, the Commission subsequently gave a commitment to come forward by 1 July 1995 with a further proposal on maximum journey limits.

The Council unanimously agreed three directives establishing certain maximum pesticide residue levels in cereals and products of animal and plant origin, a decision establishing rules on the storage and marketing of eggs, a regulation fixing the support prices for certain fruits and vegetables for July 1994, and a regulation establishing a Community scheme for plant variety rights. No decision was reached on the site of the European Community plant variety office, and this issue will be considered further during the German Presidency. I urged the Council to locate the office at Cambridge in view of that city's unique blend of scientific and technical expertise and excellent communications.

The Council also agreed by qualified majority a directive establishing uniform principles for the evaluation of plant protection products—Germany and the Netherlands voting against—and a decision designed to provide better financial discipline and prioritisation of programmes for assistance under the veterinary fund. I voted against this proposal because of an associated Council resolution whose wording contained the potential to undermine overall budgetary control.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions she has had concerning the unpublished European Commission report on the reform of the common agriculture policy; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[pursuant to her reply, 24 March 1994, c. 372]:* The study to which my hon. Friend referred has still not been published. However an article by Mr. Knud Munk, an economist employed by the Commission's DG II, which appears to cover similar ground, has recently been published in the Journal "European Economy". Copies of this article have been placed in the House Library.

The basic thrust of the article is to point to the attractions of nationally funded direct payments to farmers, de-coupled from production, as a replacement for other forms of agricultural support.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 June 1994

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Court of Justice

24. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will take steps to publish a record of the accumulated legal costs borne by the United Kingdom in the cases initiated against Her Majesty's Government in the European Court of Justice.

The Solicitor-General: Legal costs excluding travel and subsistence totalled approximately £90,000 in nine out of the 10 cases brought since 1 January 1986.

Prosecutors' Code

25. **Mr. Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to make the revised code for prosecutors known to the public.

The Attorney-General: The revised "Code for Crown Prosecutors" was published by the Director of Public Prosecutions on 21 June 1994. It has been widely distributed to those with an interest in the criminal justice system. Copies are available from Crown Prosecution Service headquarters.

Lenient Sentences

26. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases have been referred to him in the last 12 months as being unduly lenient sentences.

The Attorney-General: One hundred and sixteen sentences have been considered and I have applied for leave to refer 46 as appearing to me to be unduly lenient.

Crown Prosecution Service

27. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to make an official visit to the Crown Prosecution Service in Chester to discuss the work of the office; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has no plans to visit the Crown Prosecution Service in Chester, but I shall be visiting offices of the Crown Prosecution Service in the north-west area, of which Chester is a part, in the near future.

Guildford and Woolwich Bombings Inquiry

28. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Attorney-General when and in what form he expects to publish Sir John May's inquiry into the Guildford and Woolwich bombings case; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I expect to publish the report shortly.

PC Guscott

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Attorney-General what change of policy will be made by the Crown Prosecution Service as a result of the case of PC Guscott at Bridgwater magistrates court.

The Attorney-General: The CPS is aware of the difficulties and dangers which police officers face in their work. This is a factor which is always taken into account in deciding whether the prosecution of a police officer is in the public interest. The public interest however also demands that officers should conduct themselves within the law. These cases are considered with great care according to their individual merits. The DPP does not consider any change of approach to be necessary.

Racial Harassment

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the Crown Prosecution Service guidelines on dealing with cases of racial harassment.

The Attorney-General: The revised edition of the "Code for Crown Prosecutors" makes it clear that a prosecution is likely to be needed if, among other considerations, the offence was motivated by any form of discrimination against the victim's ethnic or national origin.

SCOTLAND

Law Officers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the Lords Advocate and Solicitors-General who have held office since 1964.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	Date
Lord Advocate	
George Gordon Stott QC	1964
Lord Wilson of Langside QC	1967
Norman Russell Wylie QC MP	1970
Ronald King Murray QC MP	1974
Lord Mackay of Clashfern QC	1979
Lord Cameron of Lochbroom QC	1984
Lord Fraser of Carmyllie QC	1989
Lord Rodger of Earlsferry QC	1992
Solicitor General	
James Graham Leechman QC	1964
Henry Stephen Wilson QC	1965
Ewan George Francis Stewart QC	1967
David William Robert Brand QC	1970
William Ian Stewart QC	1972
Lord McCluskey of Churchhill QC	1974
Nicholas Hardwick Fairbairn QC MP	1979
Peter Lovat Fraser QC	1982
Alan Ferguson Rodger QC	1989
Thomas Cordner Dawson QC	1992

Criminal Justice

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made with the review of the Scottish criminal justice system; and what conclusions he has reached on proposals for improving the delivery of justice in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I have today laid before Parliament and published a White Paper entitled "Firm and Fair" which sets out the Government's proposals for reform of the Scottish criminal justice system. The White Paper is the culmination of a wide-ranging review of the Scottish criminal justice system and criminal legal aid, in which I have sought the views of all those with a genuine interest in the delivery of justice in Scotland. The response to the four consultation papers we issued was very encouraging. We have received a large number of thoughtful comments which have been carefully considered. The White Paper contains the Government's conclusions following that consideration.

The White Paper also reports on our consideration of those recommendations of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice which were of relevance to Scotland and includes proposals on other aspects of the Scottish criminal justice system which were not part of the main review exercise.

The proposals in the White Paper seek to ensure that offenders are quickly identified, brought to account and punished and that all those who come into contact with the criminal justice system, whether as victims, witnesses or jurors, are dealt with fairly and sensitively. The proposals include action to tighten up bail procedures and to deal with people who commit offences while on bail, changes to pre-trial procedures, the operation of the jury system, the powers of the courts and appeals procedures.

On certain issues, I have concluded that there should be no change or that further work is necessary. One of the most controversial issues on which I consulted was the future of the not proven verdict. This provoked a healthy public debate. The clear weight of opinion was, however, in favour of retention and I have decided that the three verdicts, including not proven, should remain.

I also consulted on the need for change in the Appeal Court's consideration of appeals and the handling of alleged miscarriages of justice in Scotland, in the light of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice for a new independent review authority for England and Wales. The response to the consultation was inconclusive and, given the complexity and importance of these related issues, I have decided to appoint an independent committee, which will include a senior member of the judiciary, to consider both these matters in the Scottish context and to report to me. I shall announce the membership and remit of the Committee soon.

The consultation exercise has been productive and worthwhile. I believe that the proposals contained in this White Paper will command widespread support. I also believe that they will significantly improve the delivery of justice in Scotland. Where legislation is required to implement the proposals contained in the White Paper, it will be brought forward at the next available opportunity.

ENVIRONMENT

Appointments

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many and what proportion of *(a)* chairmen, *(b)* chief executives and *(c)* board members of (i) urban development corporations and (ii) housing action trusts are women.

Mr. Gummer: The number and proportion of women in urban development corporations and housing action trusts are as follows:

	Number of Women	*Proportion of Women*	
		Per cent.	*Per cent.*
(i) Urban Development Corporations			
(a) Chairmen	0	0	
(b) Chief Executives	0	0	
(c) Board Members	22	18	
(ii) Housing Action Trusts			
(a) Chairmen	1	20	
(b) Chief Executives	0	0	(16[1])
(c) Board Members	22	46	

[1] The acting chief executive at the shadow Stonebridge housing action trust is a woman. The parliamentary process to establish the HAT is currently underway.

Sweetloves Reservoir, Bolton

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of North West Water plc's actions in respect of the preservation of the amenity values of Sweetloves reservoir, Bolton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have considered carefully the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend over North West Water's proposed redevelopment of the Sweetloves reservoir, together with the information provided by the company to my Department. While I consider that it would have been better if the company had carried out consultations prior to draining the reservoir and bringing forward its redevelopment proposals, I am satisfied that failure to do so does not of itself constitute a breach of the company's statutory environmental duties under the Water Industry Act 1991. I have however written to North West Water informing it of my serious concerns over its handling of this matter.

Quarries, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy relating to the development of quarries within the area of Doncaster metropolitan borough council.

Mr. Baldry: Policy guidance on the provision to be made for minerals in development plans is given in minerals planning guidance notes 1 and 6. In particular MPG 6 sets out regional apportionments for meeting projected demand for aggregates to 2006. In drawing up policies and proposals in their development plans for meeting the demand for aggregates and other minerals, mineral planning authorities should have regard to the local apportionments for the supply of aggregates and the other guidance in MPG 6.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of South Yorkshire metropolitan borough councils in rank order their full-time equivalent number of employees per thousand of population.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is not available centrally. However, figures are available for the total number of employees per thousand of population. These are:

	Staff[1]	*Population*[2] *(thousands)*	*Staff per thousand population*
Barnsley	11,386	225	50·6
Doncaster	14,718	294	50·1
Rotherham	12,581	255	49·3
Sheffield	22,959	531	43·2

Sources:
[1] Joint Staffing Watch March 1994.
[2] OPCS mid year estimates of population 1992.

Homelessness

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority, housing association and voluntary sector hostel bedspaces for single homeless people there were in England on *(a)* 31 December 1993 and *(b)* 31 March 1994, or the most recent figures available.

Sir George Young: Information on short-life accommodation managed by housing associations in England, including property owned by a local authority, is published for the year ending 31 March 1993 by the Housing Corporation in table 13.1, page 47 of "Housing Associations in 1993", an analysis of the annual statistical survey, part 1, general report. No information is held centrally on short-life accommodation owned by local authorities and not managed by housing associations. A copy of the report is held in the Library.

Domestic Heating Radiators

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has on accidents arising from surface heat of domestic heating radiators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Department of the Environment does not keep statistics on this subject. In general, reducing surface heat to a level which is completely safe will also result in living space temperature falling to a level incompatible with comfort.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations cover the surface temperature of domestic heating radiators.

Mr. Atkins: There are no regulations relating specifically to the surface temperature of domestic heating radiators. In sheltered accommodation, such as nursing homes, the relevant local authority has responsibility for setting a maximum surface temperature for radiators.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans she has to increase the powers of local authorities and affected persons to take action against noisy neighbours.

Mr. Atkins: Local authorities and individuals already have a range of powers to tackle neighbour noise nuisance. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities can serve abatement notices to control noise from domestic and other premises which they judge to be a statutory nuisance. These powers have recently been extended by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993 to control certain types of noise in the street, including misfiring vehicle alarms. Contravention of abatement notices can lead to substantial fines.

In addition, a number of local authorities have successfully confiscated equipment such as hi-fis and stereos where an abatement notice has been ignored. Individuals can also take their own action in the magistrates' court to have a noise nuisance abated or they can take civil action.

Local Government Finance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the current distribution of standard spending assessments in reflecting need to spend in *(a)* deprived local authority areas and *(b)* Birmingham.

Mr. Curry: The standard spending assessment formulae, which apply to authorities throughout England, contain many indicators related to the additional need to spend in deprived local authority areas. As well as the economic and social indices which reflect general needs, there are indicators such as the proportion of children in lone-parent families or in families receiving income support, homeless households, households living in non-self-contained accommodation and elderly residents with a long-term illness. These indicators have been chosen after detailed statistical analysis of the patterns of local authorities' spending.

Housing

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the analysis of English housing fitness contained in the report "English Homes—A National Asset?" presented to him in March; and what proposals he intends to make in response.

Sir George Young: The analysis of housing fitness contained in the report "English Homes—A National Asset?" is based on the 1991 English house condition survey, published by the Department in September 1993. The recommendations of the report are being considered in the context of the Department's current review of the future of private housing renewal programmes.

Stadium, Stoneham

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision on the report of the public inquiry into the proposed community stadium at Stoneham, Southampton.

Mr. Baldry: It is hoped to announce the decision shortly.

New Forest

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses to the Department of the Environment's consultation paper "The New Forest: The Government's Proposals", published in September

1992, were received by the Department before the end of 1992; and of these responses what proportion supported the Government's proposals that *(a)* statutory designation should be given to the area broadly related to the heritage area proposed by the New Forest committee and that *(b)* a planning regime similar to that which applies in the national parks and the Broads should apply to this area.

Mr. Atkins: We received 209 responses to our consultation paper on the New Forest before the end of 1992. Sixty per cent. of these responses addressed the issue of a statutory designation for an area related to the New Forest heritage area, of which 84 per cent. supported the proposal for a statutory status which would bring with it a planning regime similar to that which applies in the national parks and the Broads.

Objective 5b Grants

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps his Department is taking to provide advice and support to local authorities in preparing bids for objective 5b grant;

(2) in which part of his Department objective 5b bids are handled.

Mr. Baldry: Applications for funding under objective 5b of the European structural funds will be handled by secretariats located at the appropriate Government office in each region.

Local authorities and other potential applicants to use objective 5b funding may obtain advice and guidance from the appropriate regional office. The European Commission is currently considering proposals for the use of the funds in each of the eligible areas, which have been prepared by the Government offices in consultation with local partnerships including the local authorities. When agreed by the European Commission, these single programming documents will provide the framework within which decisions on project applications will be made, and further guidance will be made available to interested organisations.

City Challenge

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards voluntary agencies funded through City Challenge which operate unsatisfactory employment practices and procedures.

Mr. Baldry: Decisions as to which agencies and projects City Challenge supports are matters for individual partnerships set up under the initiative and the appropriate local authorities. As far as possible, the partnerships should be satisfied that the agencies operate within the requirements of the law.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Durum Wheat, Italy

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on the discrepancy between the claimed and the satellite measured areas of durum wheat in Italy.

Mr. Jack: I understand that work on remote sensing commissioned by the European Commission in 1990 identified some discrepancies between the actual and declared areas of durum wheat in Italy. Appropriate action was taken by the Italian authorities. Remote sensing can make a useful contribution to preventing fraud and the Commission is continuing to encourage its use in appropriate circumstances.

Nutrient Intakes

Ms Corston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the recommended 1991 daily intake, reference nutrient intake and lower reference nutrient intake, for children of different ages; and what percentage these figures represent of the values recommended in 1979.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

Information concerning the reference nutrient intake —RNI—the estimated average requirement—EAR—and the lower reference nutrient intake—LRNI—for 33 nutrients were published in the 1991 Report on Health and Social Subjects No. 41 "Dietary Reference Values (DRV) for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library.

It is not possible to establish what percentage the 1991 DRVs represent of the 1979 recommended daily amounts —RDA—because figures are not comparable in the two reports.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Benefits

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set out in tabular form the non-contributory benefits and contributory benefits, where the rates of contribution are the same, available to Members of the European Parliament and hon. Members of this House on ceasing their employment, setting out the reasons for any differences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: A resettlement allowance is payable to Members of the House in accordance with the Resolution of 22 May 1991 at rates that vary between 50 and 100 per cent. of annual salary according to age and length of service. Our intention is that the same terms should be available to Members of the European Parliament. Accordingly, the Home Secretary laid an order on 24 June making certain changes to their scheme in line with improvements already made in the scheme for Members of this House.

Members of this House and Members of the European Parliament pay contributions of 6 per cent. of salary for pensions at retirement, as distinct from cessation of employment. The Home Secretary laid an order on 24 June to make certain changes to the scheme for MEPs to ensure that the benefits are the same for both schemes.

PRIME MINISTER

Broadcasting Act

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set up a Royal Commission to investigate the workings of the Broadcasting Act; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. However we are keeping the working of the Act under review.

Beggars

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what instructions are given to security staff at No. 10 Downing street for dealing with beggars in the vicinity; and how many problems with beggars have been experienced in the last three months.

The Prime Minister: None, in both cases.

British Pension Rights

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received since 1 January 1993 calling for the unfreezing of British state retirement pensions in those countries where British pensioners are denied annual upratings.

The Prime Minister: I have received numerous representations.

Press Releases (Recycled Paper)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Government Departments which issue press releases on recycled paper; and what percentage of press releases from each department are on recycled paper.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

The use of recycled and environmentally friendly paper for the issue of press releases is a matter for individual Departments. However, the Government's policy, as set out in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance", is to use its influence as a major consumer. It discriminates positively in favour of recycled and environmentally-friendly products and will use recycled or environmentally friendly paper wherever this is available, of adequate quality and represents value-for-money.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Konver Programme

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the extension of the Konver programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Commission announced a second Konver initiative for the period 1994-97, to assist the regeneration or areas affected by job losses due to defence changes. It is one of 13 community initiatives to be financed from the European structural funds.

These funds will contribute £380 million to Konver II; the allocation for the United Kingdom, and Gibraltar, will be known in July. The eligible areas should be determined in September; they will, as before, include areas other than those designated for objectives 1, 2 and 5*(b)* of the funds. A general programme describing the intended application of Konver II in the United Kingdom, and Gibraltar, is due to be prepared by October, and then needs to be agreed by the Commission. It is therefore unlikely that individual applications for grant can be considered before the new year.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade at what stage of preparation are draft contracts for the contracting out of the Insolvency Service's mechanical processing work.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No decision has yet been taken on whether to contract out this work. Drafting of any contracts has not, therefore, begun.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase the prosecution rate for inadequate accounting records by the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Stoy Hayward Consulting was invited to bid for the second phase of the work in a single tender action.

United Kingdom Manufacturers (Investment)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has that United Kingdom manufacturers are investing in increased capacity to increase exports and displace imports; and if he will publish a list of the industries in which such investment is taking place.

Mr. Sainsbury: Information on the reasons for investment by a sample of United Kingdom manufacturing industry is contained in the CBI "Industrial Trends Survey", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

European Regional Funds

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department has allocated a budget to make matching grants available to objective 5b bids in line with EU rules.

Mr. Sainsbury: No; there is no such rule.

Structural funds projects are funded jointly by the Community and the member state. My Department, and others, make public expenditure provision for the forecast value of the Community contributions. The remainder of the cost of each project is the responsibility of the beneficiary of the Community grant.

Electrical Engineers

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to use the Institution of Electrical Engineers INSPEC database and information service.

Mr. Eggar: The DTI information and library services use those sources of information most appropriate to each individual inquiry they receive. The ILS has accessed the INSPEC databases regularly over the last 10 years or so, using a variety of hosts. In addition, the ILS subscribes to a number of IEE publications.

British Coal

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many employees of British Coal have been removed from their posts on the grounds of conflict of interest where they have been interested in participation in a management buy-out of their colliery; and if those in senior positions within British Coal are deemed to be affected by the same conflict of interest.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* This is a matter for British Coal, which has put in place detailed internal guidelines designed to avoid any potential

conflicts of interest. These procedures require any manager wishing to participate in a management buy-out to obtain the consent of the chairman of the corporation to do so. I understand that in each case potential conflicts of interest are assessed and appropriate measures put in place.

Electricity Order

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects amendments to the Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 1990 to be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[pursuant to his reply, 14 April 1994, c. 253]:* I have today laid before Parliament an order further amending the Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 1990.

This order, and the earlier order which I laid on 14 April, will bring into effect a package of five amendments to the exemption order that I announced at the end of last year. One effect of this order will be to allow more companies, including some joint ventures, to be included in a qualifying group of companies that may be supplied by an unlicensed on-site generator. In addition, more small generators may be exempt from the requirement for a generation licence, as a result of the change to the definition of a "qualifying group".

This package of amendments will reduce the regulatory burden on small generators, on-site generators and companies which sell on a small proportion of the electricity they purchase.

TREASURY

VAT on Fuel

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the revenue the Treasury will derive from the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel in the financial years 1994-95 and 1995-96; how much of this will be attributable to the imposition of value added tax on the standing charge element of domestic fuel bills; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Latest published estimates of the revenue yield were set out in annex B to chapter 4 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report for 1994-95". Approximately 12 per cent. of the VAT yield is attributable to the standing charge element of domestic fuel bills.

Departmental Spending Reviews

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and which Departments have been asked to conduct a fundamental review of their spending; how many and which Departments have produced a report as a result of such a review; and how many and which Departments have *(a)* published and *(b)* plan to publish such a report.

Mr. Portillo: Four fundamental reviews were started in early 1993 covering social security, health, education and the Home Office. A further eight were announced in the November Budget last year. These covered employment and transport programmes, the legal Departments, Trade and Industry, Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, Her Majesty's Treasury and urban expenditure. It is intended that all Departments will conduct such reviews by the end of this Parliament.

The reviews once started are on-going. There are no plans to publish reports on the reviews, but their output will, as the first four reviews did last year, inform the annual public expenditure survey decisions.

Government Deficit

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the central Government deficit in the last financial year as a percentage of gross domestic profit; and what is the maximum level allowed under the Maastricht convergence criterion.

Mr. Nelson: There is no maximum level for the budget deficit allowed under the excessive deficits procedure of the Maastricht treaty. Rather, there is a reference level of 3 per cent. of GDP which is one of the factors to be taken into account in deciding whether a country has an excessive deficit.

The measure of the budget deficit used for the excessive deficit procedure is the general Government financial deficit—GGFD. This is provisionally estimated at 7·8 per cent. of GDP in 1993-94. The projections in the 1994-95 medium term financial strategy showed the GGFD being reduced to 3 per cent. of GDP in 1996-97.

Income Statistics

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 April, *Official Report,* column *169,* if he will make a statement on measures being taken to allow for changes in the family expenditure survey and in the classification of both income and taxation to improve time series statistics on the distribution of income, or specify upper and lower ranges of possible error, to overcome the problems of comparability.

Mr. Nelson: The family expenditure survey is modified over time to improve the quality and usefulness of the data and consequently changes are made which can have an effect on the continuity of published data. The aim of the Central Statistical Office article on the effects of taxes and benefits on household income is to give the best estimates for the current year. It is not possible to eliminate all inconsistencies.

Places of Worship (VAT Exemption)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the rationale underlying the decision for places of religious worship to lose their VAT exemption from 1 April 1994.

Sir John Cope: The religious activities of churches remain outside the scope of the VAT system but they pay VAT on the things that they buy. The introduction of VAT on fuel and power from 1 April 1994 applies across the board to all consumers.

National Savings Adjudicator

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the salary of the national savings adjudicator; how many disputes he has settled during the last year; and if he will give a breakdown of the settlement.

Mr. Nelson: The national savings adjudicator is paid for the amount of work he is required to carry out, at a rate of £32 per hour plus associated travel expenses. In 1993-94, this totalled £5,450.

In the year to 31 March 1994 the adjudicator dealt with 10 disputes. A breakdown of the types of dispute is outlined:

Summary of hearings held in 1993-94

	National Savings Bank Deposits	*National Savings Certificates*	*National Savings Stocks, Bonds and Premium Bonds*
Higher interest rate claim	—	2	—
Third party title claim	4	—	—
Denied receipt of monies allegedly paid	2	—	—
Negligence	—	—	—
Miscellaneous	—	2	—
Total	6	4	0
Award made in favour of claimant	2	2	—
Claim dismissed	4	2	—
Total	6	4	0
Number pending as at 31 March 1994	6	0	2

Executive Agencies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money previously attributed to civil service expenditure has not been accounted to that source of expenditure due to the establishment of executive agencies, in each year since the first executive agency was established; if he will publish a table breaking down the figures for each agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Expenditure by next steps agencies remains part of their sponsor Minister's programme.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money which was previously accounted to the civil service pay bill has not been attributed in each year since the establishment of the first executive agency; if he will publish a table breaking down these figures; what was the gross and net civil service pay bill in each relevant year; how much has been saved for accounting purposes by the civil service pay bill due to the establishment of executive agencies, expressed as a percentage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Spending by next steps agencies on civil service pay remains part of the total civil service paybill.

Public Expenditure

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the identifiable amount of public expenditure per head of population in Scotland; and by what amount, as a total sum for Scotland as a whole per annum, this differs from the average for England.

Mr. Portillo: Identifiable general Government expenditure per head in Scotland in 1992-93, the latest year for which information is available, was £3,968. The equivalent figure in England was £3,290. The total difference in public expenditure between the two countries, on this basis, was therefore some £3·5 billion.

Inward Investment

Mr. Peter Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the official estimate of the United States and Japanese direct investment in the United Kingdom as a percentage of direct investment in all European Community countries in each year from 1989 to the latest available date.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* Fully comparable information on direct inward investment in the European Community from outside the EC is not available. However the following estimates for the years 1989 to 1992 have been prepared, based on the most readily available sources.

Value of stock of direct investment in United Kingdom as a percentage of that in all EC countries

Year	*United States*	*Japan*
1989	42·1	37·7
1990	40·4	40·5
1991	39·5	40·9
1992	38·8	41·2

Sources:

1. United States Department of Commerce: "Survey of Current Business".
2. Japanese Ministry of Finance: "MITI News".

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

MI6 (Cleaners)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the estimated annual savings to be achieved from the replacement of regular cleaners at MI6 by contract cleaners.

Mr. Hurd: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in his answer to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 21 June at columns *85-86*; the contract for office cleaning services at the new Secret Intelligence Service headquarters at Vauxhall cross will achieve a substantial saving to public funds. It is not our policy to give detailed information about the expenditure of the individual security and intelligence agencies.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers & Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst & Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Goodlad: The table shows the relevant information for contracts let out to the named companies by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic and aid wings in 1992-93.

Similar information on contracts let to the named companies in the periods 1980-83, 1984-87 and 1988-91 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	Privatisation		*Market testing*		*Management advice*		*Audit*		*Consultancy*		*Other services*	
		(£)		*(£)*		*(£)*		*(£)*		*(£)*		*(£)*
Coopers & Lybrand	1	21,000	6	123,000	17	7,374,000	1	53,000	1	355,000	5	900,000
KPMG	—	—	3	58,000	—	—	5	313,000	1	5,000	1	56,000
Ernst and Young	1	175,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	76,000	—	—
Price Waterhouse	—	—	—	—	1	83,000	—	—	3	142,000	2	417,000
Touche Ross	—	—	—	—	1	8,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pannell Kerr Foster	—	—	—	—	1	29,000	—	—	—	—	—	—

No contracts were let by the FCO to Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton and Robson Rhodes in 1992-93.

Caribbean Sugar

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the United Kingdom Government are taking to ensure the continued support for Caribbean sugar in the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government remain firmly committed to the sugar protocol to the Lomé convention, which provides levy-free access to the European Union at guaranteed prices, negotiated annually, for 1·3 million tonnes of cane sugar from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Of the Caribbean countries, Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana and St. Kitts benefit from this protocol.

Nigeria

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are currently taken by diplomatic personnel in Nigeria positively to promote the interests of British industry in that country; and what plans he has to improve such representation in the immediate future.

Mr. Goodlad: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has commercial officers in Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Kano and Port Harcourt—the latter two were opened in late 1993. They are there to seek out export opportunities, advise British companies on the business to be won in the market, lobby on their behalf for major contracts and against discrimination, and to organise inward and outward trade missions. A programme of promotional activity agreed by the tropical Africa advisory group, Department of Trade and Industry and the FCO is underway with a view to increasing our market share.

The level of commercial representation in Nigeria was reviewed and adjusted by a team of inspectors in February and March 1994. The staffing requirement will be kept under review.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the number of British citizens who are currently resident in Nigeria.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are 7,000 British citizens registered with British diplomatic missions in Nigeria. In addition, the high commission in Lagos estimates that there are between 2,000 and 3,000 British citizens who are not registered. The total is therefore about 10,000.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement setting out Her Majesty's Government's policy on relations with Nigeria.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We value our relations with Nigeria. We hope to see firm progress soon towards a restoration of democratic civilian rule.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the extent to which release from custody has now been granted for those human and civil rights activists arrested in Nigeria following the annulment of the June 1993 presidential election; and what response he has made to such releases.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Those arrested immediately after the annulment of the June 1993 election were released shortly afterwards. We welcomed these releases.

In the last few weeks however there have been fresh detentions, including Chief Abiola, presumed winner of the 1993 election. We strongly regret those arrests and call on the Nigerian Government to engage all sides in political dialogue.

Antarctic Protocol Secretariat

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be able to announce the siting of the Antarctic protocol secretariat.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Discussions continue among Antarctic treaty consultative parties about where the proposed Antarctic treaty secretariat should be sited. We hope that the secretariat will be in operation by the time that the environmental protocol to the antarctic treaty enters into force.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impartiality of the Nigerian forces in supporting the UNOMIL peacemaking mission in Liberia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no reason to doubt the commitment of Nigerian forces to help implement the peace process.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Budget

34. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the United Kingdom's aid budget was *(a)* given as bilateral aid, *(b)* multilateral aid and *(c)* administered by the European Community in 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992 and currently.

Mr. Hurd: In 1979-80, 72 per cent. was bilateral aid, 12 per cent. was channelled through multilateral institutions other than the EC, and 16 per cent. was administered by the EC.

In 1983-84, the figures were 55 per cent., 15 per cent., 30 per cent.; in 1987-88 the figures were 60 per cent., 16 per cent., 24 per cent.; and in 1992-93, the most recent year for which figures are available, the figures were 54 per cent., 21 per cent., and 25 per cent. respectively.

Bosnia

35. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with his European counterparts to improve the delivery of humanitarian aid in Bosnia.

Mr. Hurd: My noble Friend the Baroness Chalker is in regular contact with her European counterparts to increase the effectiveness of aid to Bosnia.

Rwanda

36. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest position on aid to Rwanda.

Mr. Hurd: Since 6 April 1994, Britain has committed over £11 million bilaterally of emergency aid for displaced Rwandans and Rwandan refugees in neighbouring countries. We continue to monitor the situation closely and plan a further assessment mission to the region next month.

Sub-Saharan Africa

37. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the overseas aid budget for sub-Saharan Africa goes to assist sustainable development.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In 1992-93, 78 per cent. of total bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa was provided as development assistance.

Overseas Aid

38. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received this year in favour of the United Kingdom raising its contribution to overseas aid to 0·7 per cent. of GNP; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We continue to receive representations from hon. Members and others. The Development Assistance Committee has just reported that United Kingdom aid in 1993 was above the average of OECD countries in terms of percentage of GNP.

Malawi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Malawi about humanitarian needs caused by drought; and what response he has made.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In April, the Government of Malawi appealed for help to offset a serious crop failure resulting from poor rains. We have pledged 10,000 tonnes of emergency food aid costing about £2·5 million. We have also pledged a further £3 million in balance of payments support for 1994-95 to help pay for additional imports of maize. This is in addition to our earlier pledge of £12 million of balance of payments aid to support Malawi's reform programmes.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the money in the United Nations Liberian trust fund has been spent.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In addition to the United Kingdom contribution of $1 million, other contributions to date to the Liberian trust fund have been from the USA, $19·8 million and Denmark, $0·3 million.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 14 April, *Official Report*, column *259* for details of how the United Kingdom contribution is being spent. The other contributions have gone towards the costs of deploying equipping and maintaining the Ugandan and Tanzanian battalions as well as helping to maintain the rest of the ECOMOG force.

St. Kitts and Nevis

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the timetable for reviewing the framework for economic assistance to St. Kitts and Nevis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We expect to review the nature of our bilateral aid programme to St. Kitts and Nevis in early 1995. The programme will be fully committed until then, largely on assistance to infrastructure development.

HEALTH

Dentists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of *(a)* general dental practitioners in practice, *(b)* general dental practitioner practices, *(c)* community dental practitioners and *(d)* salaried dental practitioners, for each family health services authority area in England for each year since 1984; and if she will express these figures per 1,000 of the population resident in each family health services authority area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information will be placed in the Library. Information is not collected on general dental practices. As community dentists are employed by national health service trusts or district health authorities, information is not available by family health services authorities.

Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were in training for state registration in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table.

Pre-Registration in Training Population—England
Years ended 31 March 1987-1993

	Total Pre-registration	*1st Level Registered: Total*	*2nd Level Registered: Total*
1987	60,192	50,813	9,379
1988	58,042	50,167	7,875
1989	51,116	47,333	3,783
1990	51,628	49,608	2,020
1991	49,350	48,667	683
1992	51,760	51,679	81
1993	52,245	52,214	31

Source: English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Nutrition

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the numbers and percentages of the population, by age and income, with inadequate nutritional intakes for the last five years for which information is available.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available in the form requested.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to issue a report updating the 1986-87 dietary and nutritional survey of British adults.

Mr. Sackville: The adult survey was part of a rolling programme of surveys on diet and nutrition covering all population groups. The adult survey will be repeated after 1998.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research has been commissioned by her Department on the adequacy of nutritional intake among children in the last five years;

(2) what assessment she has made of the recent trends in the nutritional adequacy of the diets of children, by household disposable income and socio-economic status.

Mr. Sackville: Twelve months' field work for a dietary and nutritional survey of children aged one and a half to four and a half years was completed in July 1993. Data from this survey are now being analysed. A report of the survey is expected to be published in the autumn. It will provide information on the links between nutritional adequacy and dietary patterns and a full range of socio-economic variables.

The survey was carried out as part of the joint Department of Health and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food national diet and nutrition survey—NDNS—programme which was set up to ascertain the dietary habits and nutritional status of all sections of the population in an eight-year cycle. Field work on a survey of schoolchildren aged five to 15 years is expected to begin in 1996.

In addition the Department of Health has, since 1975, commissioned five-yearly national surveys of infant feeding practice. The last survey was in 1990. Plans are now underway for the 1995 survey. The Department has also this year commissioned a survey of infant feeding practices in Asian ethnic subgroups of the population. The results of this survey are expected in 1997. Socio-economic data are collected in all surveys of infant feeding practice.

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the perinatal mortality rate in each of the past 10 years in each district health authority in *(a)* South Yorkshire, *(b)* West Yorkshire, *(c)* North Yorkshire and *(d)* Humberside.

Mr. Sackville: This information will be placed in the Library.

Prostheses

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will amend the patients charter so that patients who by their general practitioner are to undergo hip or knee major joint surgery are informed of the type of prosthesis to be used.

Dr. Mawhinney: The patients charter already sets out the right for patients to be given a clear explanation of any treatment proposed, including any risks and alternatives, before the patient decides whether or not to agree to the treatment.

VAMP National Medicines Database

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made regarding the VAMP national medicines database; and what discussions have been held with *(a)* commercial and *(b)* academic research organisations in the United Kingdom and the United States of America regarding its future.

Mr. Sackville: Discussions with Reuters Ltd., the owners of the VAMP research databank are continuing. A seminar has been arranged for 11 July for interested researchers, academic departments, pharmaceutical companies and representatives of national health service organisations at which views will be canvassed on the best long-term management arrangements.

Infant Mortality, Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of infant mortality in each of the past 10 years in each district health authority in *(a)* South Yorkshire, *(b)* West Yorkshire, *(c)* North Yorkshire and *(d)* Humberside.

Mr. Sackville: This information will be placed in the Library.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what variation there is in the provision of infertility treatment between each regional authority in England; and what waiting lists are maintained.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those health authorities which *(a)* will

purchase in-vitro fertilisation treatment for any couple of child-bearing age, *(b)* will purchase in-vitro fertilisation treatment for a restricted group of couples and *(c)* will not purchase in-vitro fertilisation treatment for any couple.

Mr. Sackville: It is the responsibility of each individual health authority to determine its provision of infertility treatment. Information on which health authorities provide in-vitro fertilisation treatment is not available centrally. Available information on waiting times for infertility treatment is given in "Hospital Episode Statistics, Volume 2", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initiatives she proposes to reduce waiting lists for infertility treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are committed to reducing all waiting times, including that for infertility treatment. Patients charter guarantees limit the time people have to wait for hospital treatment. District health authorities are encouraged to improve upon these guarantees.

Ambulances

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulances there are per head of population in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland, *(d)* England and *(e)* the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is for individual ambulance services to determine the number of ambulances which meet the requirements. Total numbers of vehicles in England and Wales are not available centrally.

I understand that Scotland has 92 accident and emergency ambulances per million population and that Northern Ireland has 80 accident and emergency ambulances per million population.

Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints she has received in *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94 from patients and organisations representing patients at Walsgrave hospital, Coventry; and what assessment she has made of the working of the patients charter there.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received a number of letters about the Walsgrave hospitals national health service trust in Coventry. These have been referred to Mr. David Loughton, chief executive of the trust. Meeting the requirements of the patients charter is the responsibility of the trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Robert Jordan, chairman of the Walsgrave hospitals NHS trust, for details.

Hospital Trusts (Complaints)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to reduce the number of complaints received by hospital trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service trusts should be seeking constantly to raise the standards of care provided to meet the aspirations of health care purchasers and individual patients. They should give patients every opportunity to make comments and suggestions or put forward complaints on their services. Patients' complaints can and should be used for enhancing the quality of the health services provided.

Patients Charter, West Midlands

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement as to how the patients charter is working in *(a)* hospitals in the west midlands and *(b)* the health service in the west midlands;

(2) what benefit to patients the patients charter has given in the west midlands.

Dr. Mawhinney: The patients charter has brought benefits to national health service patients in all areas, including the west midlands, by informing patients of their rights and the standards of service they can expect to receive. It is an important step forward in ensuring the delivery of quality services to patients.

Vaccination Targets

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incentive payments general practitioners receive under their contracts for meeting vaccination programme targets; how the payments are related to the number of vaccines administered; and what limit exists on the number of vaccinations for which payments are made.

Dr. Mawhinney: Two incentive payments are available to general practitioners for meeting immunisation targets. The first is for achieving either higher or lower targets for immunising children aged two against diphtheria, tetanus, polio, whooping cough, measles, mumps, rubella, and, from 1 July this year, Hib meningitis. The second is for booster immunisations in children aged five against diphtheria, tetanus and polio. Details of the payment mechanisms are contained in the "Statement of Fees and Allowances", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of out-of-court settlements for medical negligence claims involving national health service bodies in each year since 1990-91.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to her answer of 10 May, *Official Report*, columns *484-86*, if she will itemise which national health service bodies have been involved in medical negligence claims, and for what amount;

(2) pursuant to her answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *537-38*, if she will itemise which national health service bodies have been involved in medical negligence claims; and for what amount.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information supplied to the Department by national health service bodies is provided voluntarily in confidence on the basis that it will be collated to show regional and national trends.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish an updated list of the chairmen and non-executive members of regional health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 25 April at column 68. Mr. P. Wright has since filled the vacancy on the board of the North West regional health authority.

Remuneration

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of remuneration paid to chairmen and members of *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities, *(c)* national health service trusts and *(d)* family health service authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on 5 May 1993 at column *91*.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will show for each NHS trust into which band the trust falls for the purpose of evaluating the chairman and non-executive members' salaries.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is the responsibility of each trust to pay its chairman in line with the appropriate band for that trust, which is based on the unit's turnover in 1988-89. Information on the band applicable to individual trusts is not available centrally. The annual rate of remuneration for all non-executive directors of national health service trusts is currently £5,000.

NHS (Private Accommodation)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private pay *(a)* bed units and *(b)* wings there were within the national health service in each year since 1990-91.

Mr. Sackville: These are local matters about which the Department does not collect information.

Medical Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to penalise medical consultants for inadequate performance.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for employing authorities.

Surgical Interventions (Quality)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of all surgical interventions are provided by unsupervised junior hospital doctors; what evidence she has as to whether the quality of this care is good; and what evidence she has as to monitoring of these practices and the provision of quality control by non-clinical managers.

Mr. Sackville: Detailed operational issues are the responsibility of health authorities and national health service trusts. Information on which staff undertake surgical interventions is not available centrally.

Hospital consultants are responsible for ensuring that junior doctors do not undertake any surgical intervention which is beyond their competence and for providing adequate supervision. The report of the 1991-92 national confidential enquiry into perioperative deaths—NCEPOD—published in 1993, commented that in some specialties, basic specialist trainees should not be left to work alone without suitable supervision and direction. NCEPOD has recommended that consultants and hospital managers at local level should work together to achieve this. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Health authorities are now responsible for funding clinical audit through contracts, and non-clinical managers are therefore involved in deciding the agenda of topics for clinical audit.

NHS Chief Executives

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what deficiencies she has identified in career training for chief executives in the NHS; and what plans she has to remedy them.

Dr. Mawhinney: There is a wide range of training and development programmes for chief executives and other senior managers in the national health service, much of it carried out at local level to meet the specific requirements of individual managers and the changing needs of the service. The national health service executive works with managers of professional and educational bodies to ensure that chief executives are able to meet the demanding standards expected of them.

Acute Beds

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, by London health district, the total number of acute beds for each of the past five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information will be placed in the Library. Figures for some district health authorities may not be comparable over the period because of boundary changes.

During the period 1988-89 to 1992-93 there was a 4-49 per cent. increase in the number of in-patients treated.

Local Pay Agreements

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects all trusts to be operating local pay agreements.

Dr. Mawhinney: The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 provided for all trusts to employ staff on such terms as they think fit. The chief executive of the NHS executive wrote on 6 June to the chief executives of all trusts asking for local action plans to be established by October 1994 for local pay machinery to be in place by February 1995.

Matrons

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to re-introduce the post of matron into all NHS hospitals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The exact titles and responsibilities of senior nurses are for local decision. The title matron may be used if appropriate. Every national health service trust is required to have a senior nurse as an executive director.

General Practice Manpower

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the trend in entry into general practice in the last three years; and what assessment she has made as to the adequacy of entry to compensate for loss.

Dr. Mawhinney: Over the past three years there have been approximately 1,400 new entrants to general practice per year in England and Wales. This has been sufficient to ensure a continuing increase in overall numbers of general practitioners.

Distinction Awards (Consultants)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the report on consultants' distinction awards will be published.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are considering the report of the working party on the review of the consultants' distinction awards scheme, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Lynfield Mount Hospital

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will appoint an independent inquiry into how a patient admitted to the secure unit located at Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford escaped from the hospital grounds on 21 June; what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the security arrangements at the secure unit and in the hospital; and what her policy is in respect of the location of secure units in residential areas.

Mr. Bowis: Bradford community health national health service trust has instigated a full investigation into this matter.

Hospitals are responsible for ensuring that security of pyschiatric patients is maintained at a level consistent with the risk that they may present to themselves or to other people. The siting of national health service facilities has, since April 1991, been subject to the normal requirements of town and country planning legislation.

Practice Nurses

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what scientific evidence she has as to the cost-effectiveness of the increase in practice nurses in primary care.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are satisfied that the effect of the increase in practice nurses is evident in benefits to patients, for example, through support of general practitioners in the provision of the following services;

immunisation—over 90 per cent. of GPs have achieved top rates;

97 per cent. of GPs have reached cervical cytology targets;

over 90 per cent. of GPs have reached band three of health promotion, while almost 90 per cent. of GPs have been approved to run chronic disease management programmes for the treatment of asthma and diabetes;

a survey conducted by MORI in 1991 found that almost four out of five elderly patients, over 75 years of age, who were offered a health check took advantage of it while nine out of ten of those patients who had the health check found it to be useful.

Dental Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women were eligible for free dental service during pregnancy and one year after the birth of the child in each of the past three financial years.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been deregistered by their dentists in each regional health authority since 1 July 1992; and how many dentists in each of the RHA areas have been involved in deregistrations.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 20 June 1994]:* The information is shown in the tables. Over a similar period total patient registrations rose by 1,049,178 or 3·8 per cent.

Table 1

General Dental Services, adult and child patients deregistered, the number of dentists deregistering patients from week ending 3 July 1992 to 1 April 1994 and the number of additions to dentists' registers[1] during July 1992 to March 1994, by region.

England

Region	*Number of patients deregistered*	*Number of additions to dentists' registers*	*Dentists deregistering[2] adults*	*Dentists deregistering[2] children*
England	659,134	21,119,080	2,392	246
Northern	20,038	1,486,949	52	14
Yorkshire	34,368	1,661,152	220	27
Trent	40,485	1,976,989	159	19
East Anglia	41,987	861,961	113	9
North West Thames	17,324	1,692,096	103	6
North East Thames	23,342	1,875,752	121	16
South East Thames	88,521	1,670,670	280	18
South West Thames	68,196	1,275,543	143	1
Wessex	63,590	1,152,992	123	1
Oxford	75,831	1,045,617	252	4
South Western	115,719	1,426,337	333	33
West Midlands	29,168	2,028,579	121	13
Mersey	8,665	1,123,464	107	6
North Western	31,900	1,840,979	265	79

Source: Department of Health

[1] Includes transfers of patients from one dentist to another and inclusions on a dentist's list of a former patient whose registration had lapsed.

[2] Some dentists will have deregistered adults and child patients and will appear in both columns.

Table 2

General Dental Services, adult and child patients deregistered, the number of dentists deregistering patients from week ending 8 April 1994 to 10 June 1994 and the number of additions to dentists' registers[1] during April 1994 by region.

England

Region	*Number deregistered*	*Number of additions to dentists' register*	*Dentists deregistering[2] adults*	*Dentists deregistering[2] children*
England	28,631	1,100,653	85	12
Northern and Yorkshire	3,295	164,009	8	0
Trent	2,916	90,373	3	1
South Thames	5,109	154,977	25	4
North Thames	937	164,422	9	0
West Midlands	2,360	95,421	4	0
North West	1,844	177,826	17	6
East Anglian and Oxford	5,328	98,982	4	0
South West	6,842	154,643	15	1

Source: Dental Practice Board

[1] Includes transfers of patients from one dentist to another and inclusions on a dentist's list of a former patient whose registration had lapsed.

[2] Some dentists will have deregistered adults and child patients and will appear in both columns.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Obscene Publications Branch

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what contingency plans he has formulated for co-ordination and liaison between Governments and international agencies responsible for supervising broadcasting standards and broadcasting regulation compliance with specific reference to sexually violent and explicit material should the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis proceed with his plans to disband the obscene publications branch of the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that no proposals about the future of the branch have been made, but the Metropolitan police have given assurances that the work of the branch, as it relates to broadcast material, will continue.

Audio-description Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has made to broadcasting authorities concerning the availability of audio-description services on television for blind and partially sighted people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: None. But I know that a consortium of the Independent Television Commission, the BBC, the ITV Association, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, together with a range of industrial and academic partners, are developing the Audetel project. This project aims to provide an audio-description commentary on television to help those who are blind or partially sighted to understand the programme. I understand that the BBC and ITV hope to begin experimental transmissions in July.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what research has been undertaken by his Department into the use of audio-described television for blind and/or partially sighted people in the United States; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Audio-description services for television were introduced in the United States in 1990. It is for the partners in the Audetel project to consider how far American experience is helpful in developing audio-descriptive services in the United Kingdom.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given by his Department in conjunction with the Department of the Environment to local authorities regarding crime prevention through planning and design.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In February the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office in consultation with the Home Office issued a circular on "Planning Out Crime" which gave detailed guidance to local authorities and others about planning considerations relating to crime prevention. Specialist advice on designing out crime is also provided to local authorities and others by police architectural liaison officers.

Birds of Prey (Thefts)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been for stealing *(a)* captive and *(b)* wild birds of prey in each year since 1990 and each month during 1994.

Mr. Maclean: The number of offenders convicted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 from 1990 to 1992 for offences related to birds are given in the table. Information is not collected centrally as to the species involved.

Number of offenders convicted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 of offences related to birds

England and Wales

Offence description	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981			
Protection of wild birds *(Section 1)*	24	33	33
Protection of nests and eggs of wild birds *(Section 1)*	2	12	7
Illegal entry into bird sanctuaries *(Section 3)*	—	2	—
Protection of wild birds in sanctuaries *(Section 3)*	—	1	—
Protection of the nests and eggs of wild birds in sanctuaries *(Section 3)*	—	—	—

Offence description	1990	1991	1992
Prohibition of certain methods of killing or taking wild birds *(Section 5)*	9	6	5
Protection of captive birds *(Section 8)*	7	—	4

Police (Performance-related Pay)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police functions he intends shall be subject to measurement in order to provide a basis for performance-related pay for chief constables and other senior officers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This matter is under discussion with the relevant interests.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the possible incentives he is considering as the rewards in a system of performance-related pay for chief constables and other senior police officers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 20 June to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge, (Mr. Shersby), *Official Report*, column 9.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will restore the practice of publishing quarterly detailed figures for recorded crime in England and Wales and in each police force area as soon as such figures can be compiled by his Department.

Mr. Maclean: I have no plans to revert to quarterly publication of recorded crime statistics.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what sources of information he relies for an assessment of intensity or persistence of law-breaking with regard to the age and sex of offenders compared with the generality of the population; and if he will publish such of it as is not already published.

Mr. Maclean: The main source of official statistics on criminal careers is the offenders index, a database containing information on all serious convictions in England and Wales from 1963 to 1992. Studies carried out using the offenders index include cohort studies which enable estimates to be made of the percentage of the population with serious convictions at different ages and by sex. Periodically, the offenders index is supplemented with information on cautioning collected from police forces. Information on the offenders index and studies carried out using it is contained in "The Offenders Tale: Janus Studies", a copy of which is available in the Library. The results of cohort and other analyses based upon the offenders index are published regularly and will continue to be so.

A detailed analysis carried out by the Home Office research and planning unit of criminal careers, including involvement in offending, frequency of offending and factors associated with persistance and desistance analysis, was published last year.

"Analysing Offending: data, models and interpretations", by Roger Tarling, published by HMSO.

Air Rifles

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to introduce measures to control the purchase of air rifles by mail order;

(2) if he will make it his policy to introduce greater controls over the purchase and possession of air rifles by young people.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. There are already extensive restrictions on the purchase, possession and use of such weapons, particularly in relation to young people. In its second annual report, the Firearms Consultative Committee, the independent statutory body established to advise Government on the firearms legislation, concluded that the law as it stands is adequate to deal with current levels of misuse. My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to introduce further controls.

Immigration Act 1971

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals under the age of 18 years who are *(a)* asylum seekers and *(b)* others are currently detained under the powers of the Immigration Act 1971, as amended; and what is the age of each such person.

Mr. Charles Wardle: On 23 June, there were 10 people detained under Immigration Act powers who were, or claimed to be, under the age of 18. A breakdown by age is in the table:

	Numbers
Asylum Seekers	
15 years	[1]1
16 years	0
17 years	8
Others	
17 years	1

[1] The detainee who claims to be 15 years old has been medically examined and is believed to be several years older.

Fire Safety

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to effect changes in the fire precautions and safety regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There are no plans at present to make changes in the fire precautions and safety regulations. However, there are proposals for changes in the report of the interdepartmental scrutiny of fire safety legislation and enforcement which was published on 22 June. A copy of that report has been placed in the Library of the House. The Government are committed to full consultation on the report's recommendations before considering whether changes should be made to the current legislative regime.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received concerning the effects on New Commonwealth children

learning English of reductions in section 11 funding; and how many such representations were *(a)* favourable and *(b)* unfavourable;

(2) what changes he proposes to make to section 11 funding; and over what time scale.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have received many representations from local authorities and associations, teacher unions, ethnic minority communities and other interested parties about reductions in section 11 funding which, it was announced in November 1992, would need to take effect in 1994-95 and 1995-96. Such representations have essentially been to express concern about implications of reductions for the education system. However, there has been widespread support among relevant organisations for the approach, which we have announced we are adopting from 1994-95, of paying grant in the form of an annual budget to each grant recipient, rather than as a fixed percentage of actual salary costs, in order to ensure maximum flexibility for grant recipients in using the substantial funding which remains available.

In the future, funding to meet particular needs of ethnic minorities will be available from the section 11 programme, or through wider regeneration programmes under the single regeneration budget.

Motor-propelled Boats

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has to protect tourists using the foreshores and beaches of Wales from nuisance caused by the use of motor-propelled boats; and if he will bring forward legislation to limit the use of such boats.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Secretary of State has no powers to control the use of power boats on the foreshores and beaches. Local authorities are able to make byelaws to control public bathing and to regulate the navigation of seaside pleasure boats to prevent danger to bathers, but this does not include a power to prohibit the use of particular types of craft. There are no immediate plans to introduce legislation to increase local authorities' powers in this area, but problems of competing demands on coastal areas were the subject of recent discussion papers published jointly by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office. Responses to these papers are currently under consideration.

Immigration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry or residence as persons of independent means were refused in the past 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on persons of independent means refused entry clearance, or admission, to the United Kingdom is not available. Twenty such persons were refused an extension of stay, and five were refused settlement, in 1993.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made over the past 12 months for persons to come to the United Kingdom or continue residence in the United Kingdom as persons of independent means on the basis of assets in excess of £500,000.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on persons of independent means applying for entry clearance, or admitted, to the United Kingdom is not available. One hundred and twenty such persons were granted an extension of stay, and 140 were granted settlement, in 1993. Such persons had assets of not less than £200,000, or income of not less than £20,000 a year. Separate information on persons with assets in excess of £500,000 is not available.

Asylum Seekers (Detention Centres)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers held in detention of 13 June by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* place of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information available relates to people detained under Immigration Act powers on 22 June, who had applied for asylum at some stage. It is set out in the table:

(a) Nationality	*Numbers*
Algeria	57
Angola	12
Azerbaizhan	1
Bangladesh	8
Bulgaria	1
Cameroon	2
China	3
Colombia	6
Cyprus	7
Djibouti	1
Egypt	4
Ethiopia	4
Ghana	62
India	117
Iran	1
Iraq	3
Israel	2
Ivory Coast	12
Jamaica	1
Kenya	7
Lebanon	1
Liberia	8
Libya	2
Morocco	3
Mozambique	1
Nationality doubtful	5
Nepalese	2
Niger	5
Nigeria	99
Pakistan	13
Peru	1
Poland	5
Romania	10
Russia	2
Sudan	4
Sierra Leone	11
Singapore	1
Slovakia	9
Somalia	6
South Africa	4
Sri Lanka	25
Tanzania	2
Thailand	1
Togo	3
Tunisia	1
Turkey	36
Uganda	3
Ukraine	1
Yugoslavia (former)	3
Zaire	28
TOTAL	606

(B) By gender

	Number
Males	565
Females	41
Total	606

(C) By length of detention

	Number
Over 12 months	18
6-12 months	101
2-6 months	318
1-2 months	68
Under 1 month	101
Total	606

(D) By place of detention

	Number
Immigration Service	
Campsfield House	135
Harmondsworth	94
Gatwick Beehive	8
Queens Building	11
Stansted	7
Port Detention	7
Newhaven	6
Prison Service	
Aberdeen	1
Belmarsh	4
Blakenhurst	8
Brinsford R C	4
Bristol	4
Bullingdon	1
Brixton	3
Canterbury	31
Cardiff	1
Chelmsford	4
Dover	23
Durham	2
Elmley	1
Erlestoke	3
Exeter	5
Feltham	4
Glen Parva	1
Gloucester	1
Greenock	8
Haslar[1]	93
High Down	11
Holloway	3
Hull	4
Leeds	4
Lewes	3
Liverpool	3
Norwich	5
Pentonville	18
Reading	1
Risley	1
Rochester	1
Shrewsbury	1
Strangeways	9
Swaleside	1
Swansea	1
Wandsworth	7
Winchester	8
Winson Green	38
The Wolds	1
Wormwood Scrubs	6
Police Cells	10
TOTAL	606

[1] Haslar Holding Centre is primarily an Immigration Service Detention Centre, although managed by the Prison Service.

(E) By immigration status at the time of application

Application made at Post following arrival in the United Kingdom	*Illegal entrants*	*Subject to deportation action*
303	258	45

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers and other immigration detainees were being held in police stations during each of the past three months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: On 22 June, 10 people who had at some stage claimed asylum were detained in police cells under Immigration Act powers. Historical information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police (Firearms)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were fully trained in the use of firearms in *(a)* 1983 and *(b)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There were 13,020 authorised firearms officers in England and Wales on 31 December 1983, and 6,769 on 31 December 1993. The drop in numbers reflects decisions by chief officers of police to concentrate their firearms capacity in a smaller number of highly trained officers.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers sustained firearm injuries in the course of their duty in *(a)* 1983 and *(b)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1985, the earliest year for which figures are readily available, 16 police officers were injured by firearms in the course of their duty in England and Wales, none fatally.

In 1992, 11 police officers were injured, one, a special constable, receiving fatal injuries.

Information for 1993 is not yet available.

Prison Births

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) of 10 May, *Official Report*, column *73*, regarding babies born in prison, what were the circumstances in which one baby was born in prison in the year 1987-88 and two babies in 1988-89; at what prison the mothers were being detained; and if he will make a statement in respect of his Department's instructions about mothers giving birth in prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Philippa Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 27 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the circumstances in which one baby was born in prison in the year 1987-88 and two babies in 1988-89; at what prison the mothers were being detained; and if he will make a statement in respect of his Department's instructions about mothers giving birth in prisons.

The establishments where the mothers were being detained at the time of birth were:

1987-88: HMP Styal
1988-89: HMP Holloway
1988-89: HM Remand Centre Risley

In each case the babies were born in prison establishments because the progress of labour was too fast to allow the mother to be taken to hospital in time. It is the usual practice for mothers to be delivered at a designated local hospital. On the rare occasions that the birth takes place in a prison establishment, the birth certificate does not show that the birth took place in prison. It instead indicates the area in which the establishment is located.

Police Officers (Abuse of Authority)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were charged with abuse of their authority in *(a)* 1983 and *(b)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Figures are not collected centrally on the categories of disciplinary charges leading to disciplinary proceedings.

Substantiated complaints from members of the public of oppressive behaviour by police officers numbered 207 in 1993: assault—94; oppressive conduct or harassment—41; unlawful or unnecessary arrest or detention—72. Equivalent figures are not available for 1983.

Firearms

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of firearms circulating illegally in Britain; and what assessment he has made of whether the number is increasing.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have made no such estimate. The Government take the illegal possession of firearms very seriously, but I am aware of no hard evidence which would indicate that it is increasing.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have had their firearms certificate withdrawn for misuse in each of the last five years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not available centrally.

Police Injuries

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work days were lost by police officers who sustained injuries in the course of their duty in *(a)* 1983 and *(b)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on the number of injuries is not held centrally. In 1990, the earliest year for which complete figures are readily available, a total of 53,626 days' sick absence resulted from assaults on police officers in England and Wales. In 1992 the equivalent figure was 47,023. Information for 1993 is not yet available.

Life Sentences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were serving a life sentence and were released from prison after serving less than 10, 15 or 20 years, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year of release	*Time served under sentence*[1] *Less than 10 years*	*10 less than 15 years*	*15 less than 20 years*
1983	49	44	7
1984	39	18	7
1985	23	32	5
1986	19	19	6
1987	15	24	8
1988	31	31	3
1989	20	42	10
1990	14	41	16
1991	21	35	9
1992	20	44	18
1993[2]	15	29	24

[1] Other than those released on compassionate grounds.
[2] Figures for 1993 are provisional.

Fire Service

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the future role of the fire service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There are no plans at present to change the role of the fire service as laid down in the Fire Services Act 1947, as amended.

The role of the fire service and other bodies responsible for enforcing fire safety legislation is currently being considered in the light of the report of the interdepartmental scrutiny of fire safety legislation which was published on 22 June. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House. The Government are committed to full consultation on the report's recommendations before considering whether changes should be made to current legislative and enforcement regimes.

TRANSPORT

Roadworthiness Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) of 21 March, *Official Report*, columns *105-7*, how many spot checks on the roadworthiness of vehicles were carried out in the year 1993-94; what was the number of traffic enforcement spot checks carried out in the same year; and how many spot checks are planned by the Vehicle Inspectorate for the current financial year.

Mr. Key: The following is the information:

Roadworthiness Inspections

	1993-94
PSV spot checks	[1]24,521
HGV spot checks	[2]120,335
LGV spot checks	[3]20,035
Taxis and Non-testable vehicles	1,558

[1] Excludes 5,165 special checks on emissions.
[2] Excludes 3,342 special checks on lighting and 10,589 on emissions.
[3] Excludes 33,103 special emission checks on cars and light goods vehicles.

Note:

In 1993-94 the Inspectorate was not asked by Departmental customers to conduct full roadworthiness spot checks on cars.

	1994-95 (planned)
PSV spot checks	[1]24,442
HGV spot checks	[2]120,413
LGV spot checks	[3]18,960
Taxis and Non-testable vehicles	1,303

[1] Excludes 4,869 special checks on emissions.
[2] Excludes 3,372 special checks on lighting and 9,129 on emissions.
[3] Excludes 33,807 special emission checks on cars and light goods vehicles.

Traffic Enforcement Inspections

Type of vehicle	*1993-94*	*1994-95 (Planned)*
Heavy Goods	240,379	306,000
Public Service	34,574	34,000
Light Goods	19,230	13,157

Road Schemes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the result of the cost benefit analysis calculations for *(a)* the Swainswick and Batheaston bypass on its own and *(b)* the Swainswick and Batheaston bypass together with the road schemes connected to its northern and its eastern end;

(2) if he will list the financial years in which funds have been allocated for the road schemes connecting with *(a)* the northern end and *(b)* the eastern end of the Swainswick and Batheaston bypass.

Mr. Key: These questions are operational matters for the Highways Agency. The chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, will be writing to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 27 June 1994:

I am writing in response to your two recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Transport about trunk road schemes near Bath. These are matters for which the Highways Agency is now responsible.

The results of the cost benefit analyses for these schemes are as follows:

(a) A4/A46 Batheaston/Swainswick bypass

Net present value (low growth)	£3·2 million
Net present value (high growth)	£17·7 million
Benefit:Cost ratio	1·32:1

(b) A46 Upper Swainswick—M4 Tormarton improvements

Net present value (low growth)	£13·1 million
Net present value (high growth	£42·2 million
Benefit:Cost ratio	2·78:1

(c) A36 Beckington—East of Bath improvement

Net present value (low growth)	£4·3 million
Net present value (high growth)	£42·2 million
Benefit:Cost ratio	1·60:1

The results are dependent on future economic growth and figures are given separately for low and high growth, which are equally likely scenarios. The benefit to cost ratio is an average which is a useful indicator of returns from investments.

Calculations have not been carried out for all the schemes together. There could be additional benefits with the completion of all three schemes, but each is justified in its own right in any event.

We are at a comparatively early stage in the development of the A46 Upper Swainswick—M4 Tormarton Improvements and the A36 Beckington—East of Bath Improvement. They are still subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures. Apart from the costs of preparation, funds have not been allocated at this stage. The claims of these schemes on our limited rsources will be assessed against other competing demands at the relevant time.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what formula officials within his Department adopt to determine whether a scheme qualifies for transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Key: No set formula is adopted. Criteria for eligibility for transport supplementary grant—TSG—are set out annually in a local authority circular on transport policies and programmes—TPP—submissions. The most recent circular, for 1995-97, is local authority circular 2/94, published on 25 May 1994. My right hon. Friend and I consider bids for TSG on their merits against the criteria and competing bids, within the resources available.

Newly Qualified Drivers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many traffic accidents involving newly qualified drivers were reported in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Information about the number of traffic accidents involving newly qualified drivers is not available. However, a high proportion of newly qualified drivers who have recently passed their test are under 22 years of age. The following table shows the number of accident involved car drivers who were under 22 years of age, since 1990.

Number of car drivers (under 22 years of age) involved in injury road accidents Great Britain 1990-93

	Drivers
1990	56,561
1991	51,017
1992	48,687
1993	43,823

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the terms of reference and scope of the feasibility study being undertaken into the upgrading of the west coast main line by Railtrack and West Coast Main Line Development Company Ltd.

Mr. Freeman: Railtrack and WCML Development Co. Ltd. have published a summary of the terms of reference and scope of the study in a document entitled "The West Coast Main Line, Progress on the Feasibility Study". I have placed copies in the Library.

Disabled People (Road-crossing Facilities)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made by local authorities with provision of road-crossing facilities for *(a)* the visually disabled and *(b)* other disabled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department of Transport has worked closely with local authorities since 1986 to give guidance on the use of dropped kerbs at road crossings to help wheelchair users in conjunction with tactile surfaces to provide guidance and warning to visually impaired pedestrians. The Department's guidance in this area is very widely followed by local authorities all over the country.

In addition to tactile surfaces, audible signals at ordinary pelican crossings have been in use for some 25 years. More recently, the "Bleep and Sweep" audible unit has been developed by the Department for use at staggered pelican crossings. This provides a directional sound which overcomes the danger of confusion to visually impaired pedestrians. A tactile cone has also been introduced which provides guidance to pedestrians who are both deaf and blind. Most recently, puffin crossings have been introduced on a trial basis by the Department. These have the major advantage for elderly and disabled pedestrians that the amount of crossing time can be extended to accommodate the needs of those who move more slowly.

Local authorities are being encouraged to include these facilities in both new designs and modifications.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to visit Paisley Gilmour Street railway station to evaluate its accessibility to disabled and infirm people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 22 June at column *245*.

Road Accidents

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities occurred in accidents involving *(a)* light goods vehicles and *(b)* cars over the last five years.

Mr. Key: The information requested is shown in the table.

Fatalities in accidents involving LGVs and cars: GB 1988 to 1993

Casualties

Year	*Accidents involving an LGV*	*Accidents involving a car*
1988	563	3,967
1989	588	4,300
1990	550	4,183
1991	501	3,704
1992	415	3,466
1993	370	3,069

EDUCATION

Bullying

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will produce a children's charter advising children on their rights generally and on the matter of bullying in particular; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no plans to produce such a charter. The Department has, however, already published a leaflet of guidance for children setting out what they should do if they are bullied.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what decisions his Department has taken in respect of TECs in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's other involvement with TECs over the same period.

Mr. Boswell: The Employment Department takes the lead on the majority of decisions concerning TECs. This Department has been strengthening its relationships with TECs, for example, through a series of regional seminars this year hosted by DFE Ministers and senior officials at which issues of mutual concern and interest have been discussed.

Student Loans

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many former students with student loans are not currently making repayments as their earned income has failed to reach 85 per cent. of average incomes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children of New Commonwealth origin he estimates will be taught English with resources obtained from the single regeneration budget; and what total amount of section 11 funding is being transferred into the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information is not readily available for the current year in the form requested in the first part of the question. The bidding round for the single regeneration budget for 1995-96 does not close until September this year. It will be up to local bidding partnerships to decide what priority to give to the needs of ethnic minority children and to bid accordingly. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has transferred, for incorporation into the single regeneration budget, the following financial year amounts from his Department's section 11 provision:

	£ million
1994-95	60·5
1995-96	53·0
1996-97	53·0

WALES

Heart Disease

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of coronary heart disease in Wales; and what was the figure 10 years ago.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1992, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 9,198 deaths in Wales from coronary heart disease representing 3·2 deaths per 1,000 population. In 1983, the figure was 9,880, representing 3·5 deaths per 1,000 population.

Development Board for Rural Wales

15. **Mr. Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent consultations he has had on the future of the Development Board for Rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend and I have consulted widely on the review and we are carefully considering the responses received. My right hon. Friend will announce his conclusions before the summer recess.

District Nurses

16. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the number of unremunerated hours worked by district nurses in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Local Government

17. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on decentralisation schemes for local government in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the debates in the House at Report stage of the Local Government (Wales) Bill on 15 and 16 June. I will issue guidance under clause 27 of the Bill in due course.

Welsh Language Act

18. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the implementation of the Welsh Language Act 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Good progress is being made. Most importantly, the Welsh Language Board is preparing statutory guidelines for Welsh language schemes about which it will consult later this year and which my right hon. Friend will put before the House thereafter.

Port Talbot Hospital

19. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of Port Talbot hospital.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: West Glamorgan health authority is proposing to close this hospital and to move on to improved arrangements for health care, including a new modern hospital at Baglan.

Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of Welsh housing stock is constructed or adapted to meet the needs of physically disabled people at the latest date for which information is available; if he will break this information down into categories of housing tenure; what plans he has to enhance the availability of such housing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In the 1994 housing strategies and operational plans round, local authorities reported 2,678 local authority and 1,511 registered housing association properties as meeting the particular requirements of disabled people. These figures represent 1·27 per cent. of total local authority stock—as at 1 April 1994—and 3·62 per cent. of total registered housing association stock—as at 31 May 1994—respectively. Figures are not available for the private sector. Disabled facilities grants, local authority expenditure on aids and adaptations and the special needs policy of Housing for Wales are the main vehicles for ensuring an adequate supply of adapted housing.

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total funding unaccounted for, or misused by, non-departmental public bodies in Wales during the year 1993-94; if he intends refunding such money to local authorities or relevant bodies which have suffered difficulties because of this mismanagement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The accounts for non-departmental public bodies for 1993-94 are currently being audited and will be laid before Parliament in due course.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Redwood: Information is available only from 1988-89. Over this period the Welsh Office has awarded contracts to five of the firms mentioned for consultancy work, including market testing. Information on the number of contracts awarded is as follows:

	1988-89 to 1991-92		1992-93	
	Market testing	Consultancy	Market testing	Consultancy
Coopers and Lybrand	1	9	1	5
KPMG Peat-Marwick	—	5	—	5
Ernst and Young	—	1	—	—
Price Waterhouse	—	3	1	—
Touche Ross	—	13	1	5

Details of expenditure with individual firms cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Medical Consultants (Merit Awards)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what statutory basis he withheld the names of those medical consultants in Wales who currently hold merit awards.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The names of individual award holders have always been regarded as confidential on the ground that the earnings of individual members of staff are a matter between the employee and his or her employer. Publication of the names of award holders might also lead individual patients to judge the quality of the treatment afforded on the basis of the level of award held.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to remove the confidential nature relating to the names of those medical consultants in Wales who currently hold merit awards.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The working party to review the consultant's distinction awards scheme set up by the Minister for Health in November 1993 was asked to consider as part of its deliberations whether the names of award holders should in future be published. The report of the working party is currently being considered, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Infertility, Gwent

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what provision is made for infertility investigation in Gwent;

(2) what is the provision for infertility treatment in Gwent.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision for infertility investigation and treatment is a matter for Gwent health authority which will take into account need, competing demands and available resources.

Exports

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of Britain's manufacturing industry exports originated in Wales in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Export statistics are collected on a United Kingdom basis by HM Customs and Excise at the point at which goods leave the country. It is not currently possible to routinely separate out figures for exports which originate from Wales.

Hospital Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales where is the highest recorded increase in the published extra-contractual raferrals tarrif between the tariff in 1993-94 and the tariff in 1994-95 and in the specialties of *(a)* ENT, *(b)* general surgery, *(c)* ophthalmology, *(d)* orthopaedics and *(e)* general medicine.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The highest average increase for general surgery is at Wrexham Maelor hospital NHS trust; for general medicine it is at Llandough hospital NHS trust and for ENT, ophthalmology and orthopaedics it is at Carmarthen and District NHS trust.

These increases need to be interpreted with care as hospitals are refining both the classification of services and the way costs are allocated to them.

Boat Accidents

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many accidents involving motor-propelled craft and speed boats were reported off the coast of Wales during each year since 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Commercial Property

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the commercial property market in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: During the past 18 months, my Department has received about a dozen representations, on four main areas—rent reviews, confidentiality clauses in leases, dispute procedures and unfair leases.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated income of the national insurance fund for 1993-94, in total, from each class of contribution, from the Treasury and from other sources; and what was the estimated expenditure of the fund for each benefit, administration and other outgoings.

Mr. Hague: The figures shown in the table are both provisional and estimated. The actual figures for 1993-94 will not be known until the autumn as full details of income and expenditure will not be available until then. The figures will also be subject to scrutiny by National Audit Office.

Income of the National Insurance Fund:	£ million
Contributions	
Class 1: Employees	12,224
Employers	19,576
	31,800

Class 1A	430
Class 2	464
Class 3	43
Class 4	560
	33,297
LESS: Recovery of SSP	–679
Recovery of SMP	–434
Total Contributions	32,184
State scheme premiums	137
Investment income	500
Payment from Consolidated Fund	1,094
Exchequer grant	7,589
Total Income	41,504
Expenditure of the National Insurance Fund:	
Retirement Pension	28,169
Widows Benefit	1,046
Sickness Benefit	292
Invalidity Benefit	7,033
Unemployment Benefit	1,618
Xmas Bonus	116
Guardian's Allowance and Childs Special Allowance	1·5
Maternity Allowance	33·5
Total Benefit Expenditure	38,309
Administration	1,554
Other Outgoings	354
Total Expenditure	40,217
Excess of income over outgo	1,287
Opening Balance 1 April 1993	3,436
Estimated Balance in Fund at the end of year	4,723

Note: The above figures are comprised of estimates from the Government Actuary Department for contribution income, the latest departmental view, based on the June in-year monitoring report of benefit expenditure and actual figures from the Department's accounting system. National Audit Office has yet to audit the figures which will be in the draft annual account and due to be presented to the Department's accounting officer in October 1994.

Income Support

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will specify the annual income entitlement, supplementary benefit or income support, excluding housing benefit for *(a)* a single unemployed person aged 24 years and *(b)* a man and a woman both aged 34 years with two children aged 12 and 11 years, for each year since 1979, at April 1994 prices on the Rossi index.

Mr. Burt: The figures requested are in the attached table.

Part of our policy in replacing supplementary benefit was to target benefit on those groups most in need, and we succeeded. Since 1988 we have given extra help, over and above normal upratings, to families with children. The income support rates for single people aged 18 to 24 take account of the fact that the vast majority live as members of someone else's household.

A Financial year	*B* Single unemployed 24 year old	*C* 34 year old couple with children aged 11 and 12
1979-80	1,974·53	4,868·14
1980-81	2,012·82	5,124·23
1981-82	2,064·88	5,467·05
1982-83	2,118·34	5,606·61
1983-84	2,182·33	5,773·89
1984-85	2,185·28	5,782·62
1985-86	2,188·14	5,790·91
1986-87	2,208·75	5,852·50
1987-88	2,185·95	5,792·06
1988-89	1,790·41	6,171·93
1989-90	1,785·39	6,255·39
1990-91	1,750·05	6,164·66
1991-92	1,764·48	6,205·64
1992-93	1,829·63	6,463·59
1993-94	1,838·64	6,495·98

Notes:

Column B – shows for 1979 to 1988 the annual supplementary benefit entitlement, at 1994 prices, for a single householder. From April 1988 the figures are the annual entitlement to income support, at 1994 prices, for a single unemployed person aged 18-24. No additions which might have been payable within supplementary benefit or income support premiums for special needs have been included.

Column C – shows for 1979-88 the annual supplementary benefit entitlement, at 1994 prices, for a couple (aged 18 or over) with two children aged 11 and 12. From April 1988 the figures are the annual income support entitlement, at 1994 prices, for the same family composition. No additions which might have been payable within supplementary benefit have been included. The income support figures included the family premium which is paid automatically.

The Rossi index (ie the retail prices index less housing costs) has been used to revalue at 1994 prices because there is no housing element in the entitlement shown.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were claiming income support in Scotland, Wales and for each of the standard English regions for the most recent date for which figures are available; and what estimate he has made of the total number of partners and dependants of those income support recipients in each area.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

	Number of claimants 000s	*Number of partners 000s*	*Number of dependents 000s*
North East	839	153	464
North West	812	127	455
Midlands	912	178	530
London North	1,018	189	595
London South	915	155	511
South West	411	77	210
Wales	312	55	174
Scotland	553	79	268
Total	5,771	1,013	3,207

Notes:

1. Source: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry August 1993
2. Figures are for DSS administrative Regions.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the present policy of the Contributions Agency towards the allocation of national insurance numbers to people seeking work.

Mr. Hague: The Department's long-standing policy has been to allocate national insurance numbers, in accordance with regulation 44 of the Contributions Regulations 1979, to applicants who may be liable to pay NI contributions. This includes the employed, the self-employed, those who wish to pay voluntary contributions and those approaching the age of 16. The Department also uses the NI number as an administrative identifier within the social security benefit system and allocate NI numbers to people who claim certain benefits and who do not already have a number.

The Department has recently been reviewing the policy and procedures for allocating NI numbers to those who are seeking work. As a result, the Contributions Agency will shortly be issuing new guidance to its local offices. This will specify that they can accept applications from people who can demonstrate satisfactorily that they are seeking employment. If, however, the applicant cannot demonstrate satisfactorily why he needs a NI number, the Department may consider refusing the application. The Department's refusal to allocate a number in such cases does not prevent the applicant re-applying when it is appropriate to do so. Nor does it prevent anyone taking up employment before he receives a NI number.

Living Standards (Children)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research he has commissioned or undertaken in the past five years in specific relation to article 27(1) of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child on an adequate standard of living.

Mr. Burt: No research has been undertaken specifically as a result of article 27(1) of the convention. However, research is regularly conducted into the role of social security and its impact on those in low income households. A list of research projects sponsored by the Department is published in the "Social Security Research Yearbooks" —formally the "DHSS Handbook of Research and Development"—copies of which are in the Library.

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on the rate of deduction from income-related benefits for capital held by the claimant; and what response he has made.

Mr. Burt: The Department has received correspondence on this issue from a variety of sources. We have no current plans to change the formula applied for taking account of capital in excess of £3,000 when calculating entitlement to income-related benefits.

Vaccine Damage

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been made on behalf of vaccine-damaged children for the vaccine-damaged payment, who have been accepted as vaccine damaged but were turned down because their disability was less than 80 per cent.; and how many parents have applied but have been turned down because of the six year ruling.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the vaccine damage payment scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Richard Burden, dated 24 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Vaccine Damage Scheme.

The information is not available in the exact format requested. I have been able to provide information from the first date from which figures are available, June 1981.

Since June 1981 there have been 853 claims made on behalf vaccine damaged children for the vaccine damaged payment. Of these, 8 have been accepted as vaccine damaged but were turned down because their disability was less than 80 per cent.

I am not able to provide you with details of the number of parents who have applied but been turned down because of the six year rule. This is because records held do not classify "parents" separately. However, I can tell you that since June 1981, with regard to all claims, the number of claims disallowed because of the six year rule is 209.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of vaccine damage payments and the financial cost of compensation paid out to victims and their families for each year since 1987.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table[1].

Year	*£*
1987	150,000
1988	80,000
1989	70,000
1990	10,000
1991	50,000
1992	360,000
1993	60,000

Financial compensation is payable only when there has been a delay in dealing with the claim. Since 1987, approximately £25,000 has been paid in this way.

Note: [1] Figures are subject to amendment as further awards may be made on review or appeal.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many vaccine damage cases seeking compensation have been rejected and how many approved, breaking down the figures by category of damage for which the payments were made, in each year since 1987.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table[1].

Years	*Awards*	*Disallowances*
1988	5	38
1989	2	53
1990	Nil	40
1991	2	41
1992	[2]16	36
1993	3	46

[1] Figures are subject to amendment as further awards may be made on review or appeal.

[2] The increase in awards for 1992 was due to a combination of factors and includes a number of awards for claims made in earlier years, some consequent upon Vaccine Damage Tribunal findings.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the vaccine damage scheme for each year since 1987.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The administrative costs of the vaccine damage payment unit are subsumed within those of a larger administrative unit at Fylde, Blackpool.

Benefits

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the live load in each of the area directorates in Scotland, Wales and England for sickness benefit, invalidity benefit and income support, of 16 to 17-year-olds, for the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema paid in 1993-94; what is his estimate for 1994-95; and if he will break down the figures by social security districts.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. The estimated total annual benefit cost for the 12 months following prescription was £6 million. A similar cost, at 1993-94 prices, is estimated for the second and subsequent years.

DEFENCE

Landmines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the incidents involving British troops who are serving with United Nation forces in Bosnia have been caused by landmines produced or supplied by United Kingdom companies.

Mr. Hanley: None of which we are aware.

Bases (Sales)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the bases his Department has *(a)* sold since 1991, *(b)* is currently attempting to sell and *(c)* intends to sell in whole or in part;

(2) if he will list the purchasers and purchase price of the bases his Department has sold since 1991.

Mr. Hanley: The bases that my Department sold between 31 March 1991 and 1 June 1994 are:

Base and Location
OFD Brixham, Devon
OFD Willand, Devon
OFD Swanvale, Cornwall
Hamoaze House, Plymouth
Royal William Yard, Plymouth
RAF Mount Batten, Plymouth
Mount Wise West, Plymouth
Old Infirmary, Plymouth
Leavesden Airfield, Hertfordshire
Stoughton Barracks, Guildford
RNSM Risley, Cheshire
Cove Radio Station, Hampshire
Filton Airfield, Avon
Former Wilmslow MU, Cheshire
RNAD Milford Haven, Dyfed:
1. Depot
2. Land and Building
3. Land
4. Farmland
5. Farmland
6. Houses
Wood Farm Camp, Malvern
Wood Top Mill, Burnley
Former Western District HQ, Shrewsbury:
1. Mess
2. MT Depot
3. HQ Houses
4. Land
Burniston Barracks, Scarborough
RAF Chessington, Surrey
HMS St. Vincent (Furze House), London
Harefield House
Former ARE Depot, Bapaume Road, Portsmouth
Ex RN Repair Depot, Fareham
Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth
HMS Mercury, Petersfield
Signals Training Centre,
Former RAF Sopley, Hampshire
Jellalabad Barracks, Taunton
RAF Escrick, North Yorkshire
OFD Invergordon:
1. Depot
2. Tomich Pumphouse
Storage Depot, Lathalmond
Primrose Camp, Rosyth, Fife
USN Radio Station, West Murkle, Thurso Bay
Radio Station, Inverkip, Strathclyde
SEMO Gillingham, Kent
RAF Ely, Cambridge
Gibraltar Barracks, Northampton
RAF Orfordness (Site included an area owned by FCO)
USN Facilities, Holy Loch:
1. Commissary, Queen Street, Dunoon
2. Dolphin Hall, Queen Street, Dunoon
3. Ardnadam Complex, Sandbank
4. Families Service Centre
5. Medical/Dental Centre
6. Land at Sandbank
7. Supply Depot and Pier
8. Sailing Club
9. Rankin Complex
Inveraray Pier
RAF Biggin Hill, Kent
Aerial Site, Hawklaw, Fife
RAF Greatworth, Northamptonshire:
1. Land and Buildings
2. Land
3. Land (2 plots)
4. Land
5. Land
RAF Northcoates, Lincolnshire

The bases that my Department intends to dispose of and is currently marketing are:

Base	*Location*
RNSD Broughton Moor	Cumbria
CVD Hilton	Derbyshire
RNAD Trecwn	Dyfed
OFD Sully	South Glamorgan
PE & E Cold Meece	Stone, Staffordshire
DRA Swynnerton	Stone, Staffordshire
Meteorological Office Aughton	Nr Ormskirk, Lancashire
ROC HQ Church Lawford	Nr Rugby, Warwickshire
RAF Jurby Head	Isle of Man
Former HMS Phoenix	Portsmouth, Hampshire
Old Park Barracks	Dover
OFD Radford Woods	Plymouth
Rennes Lentney Camp	Plymouth
HMS Royal Arthur	Corsham, Wiltshire
Priddy's Hard	Gosport, Hampshire
Peninsula Barracks	Winchester, Hampshire
DRA Christchurch	Dorset
RAF Bentwaters	Nr Saxmundham, Suffolk
DRA Bedford	Bedford
DRA Farnborough	Hampshire

Base	Location
324 Engineering Park	Lathalmond, Fife
RAF Hendon (East Camp)	Greater London
RAF Greenham Common	Newbury, Berkshire
Beavers Lane Camp	Hounslow, Greater London
RNSD Lathalmond	Dunfermline, Fife
PTS Medmenham	Medmenham, Buckinghamshire
OSDD Ruddington	Nottingham
RAF Swinderby	Nr Lincoln
DRA Waltham Abbey	Greater London
Royal Arsenal East and West	Woolwich, Greater London
Winston Barracks	Lanark
Former USN Communications Station	Forss, Caithness
'St Lukes', Regimental HQ and Museum, Aberdeen	Grampian
Fairfield House, Aberdeen	Grampian
CSOS Hawklaw	Cupar, Fife
Meteorological Office Site	Shanwell, Tayport
RAF Chicksands	Shefford, Bedfordshire
RAF Leicester	Oxon

It is my Department's practice not to disclose details of purchasers or purchase prices on the ground of commercial confidentiality. The sale prices did, however, represent the market value at the time of the sale.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the individuals or commercial enterprises which have expressed an interest in buying each base his Department is currently trying to sell.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Royal Navy Armaments Depot, Trecwn

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date tenders were invited from estate agents and surveyors for the contract to market Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn.

Mr. Hanley: Invitations to tender for the contract to market RNAD Trecwn were sent to estate agents and surveyors on 28 January 1994.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which individuals or commercial enterprises plans, details or inventories of the facilities at Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn were supplied during 1992.

Mr. Hanley: As far as can be ascertained, no details or inventories of the facilities at RNAD Trecwn were released to non-MOD bodies in 1992.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which individuals or commercial enterprises *(a)* plans, *(b)* details and *(c)* inventories of the facilities of Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn have been supplied since July 1991.

Mr. Hanley: Details of the facilities in RNAD Trecwn have been made widely available to individuals, commercial enterprises, statutory bodies and local authorities. Although comprehensive records have not been maintained of all those to whom information has been made available, my Department is aware of over 80 individuals or organisations to whom this material has been provided.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department announced its intention to sell Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn.

Mr. Hanley: Together with the other "Options For Change" rationalisation measures, an announcement to close RNAD Trecwn was made on 16 July 1991.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date expressions of interest in buying Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn were first invited.

Mr. Hanley: Formal expressions of interest in buying RNAD Trecwn were first invited in the form of a press release on 11 April 1994 arranged by the Department's agents.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date *(a)* plans, *(b)* details and *(c)* inventories at Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn were first made publicly available to promote the sale at the base.

Mr. Hanley: Plans, details and inventories at RNAD Trecwn were launched to promote the sale at the establishment with the publication of the sales particulars on 27 April 1994, but details were available prior to that date on request from the Defence land agent.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which individuals or commercial enterprises details, plans or inventories at Royal Naval armaments depot, Trecwn were supplied during February 1993.

Mr. Hanley: The then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) undertook in February 1993 to send details of RNAD Trecwn and a site plan to Mr. R. Philipps and these were delivered to him by the Defence land agent in March of that year.

Naval Forces (Co-operation)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement outlining the number and dates of the meetings which have taken place over the past 12 months between representatives of his Department and representatives of the French Government on co-operation between the naval forces of the two nations; what was the nature of the subject matter covered in these discussions; and whether the operation of nuclear missile submarines was discussed.

Mr. Hanley: My Department holds regular discussions with French and other European nations during which many aspects of co-operation and equipment collaboration may be discussed, including issues related to nuclear deterrence.

Hazardous Waste

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) of 26 May, *Official Report*, column 232, what the national and international regulations governing the movement and destruction of hazardous waste lay down as the minimum technical requirements for the handling of this waste; and whether these requirements obtain in all the third-world countries to which hazardous and toxic waste is exported.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

Transfrontier shipments of waste into and out of the United Kingdom are now governed by Council Regulation (EEC) No. 259/93, on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community. The regulation fulfils the EC's obligations under the Basel convention. Shipments of wastes covered by the regulation must comply with a wide range of international transport conventions, listed in annex 1 to the regulation, dealing with the safety of consignments in transit. Disposal facilities in Great Britain must operate in accordance with authorisations given under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and waste management licences issued by waste regulation authorities under part II of that Act. The regulation prohibits shipments of waste for disposal outside the European Community, other than to EFTA countries which are parties to the Basel convention.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Information

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what rules govern the acquiring of information by Ministers or Whips on issues outside their responsibility and not connected with constituency issues.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are no formal rules on this matter beyond the obligation of all Ministers to preserve the privacy of Cabinet business and protect the security of Government documents.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what rules govern the passing of information with a commercial value gained by Ministers or Whips on to relatives.

Mr. Waldegrave: Ministers are expected to act in such a way as to uphold the highest standards and protect the integrity of public life.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what trends there have been in unemployment rates for the past 12 months for *(a)* females and *(b)* males (i) on a national basis and (ii) regionally.

Miss Widdecombe: Claimant unemployment rates for both males and females fell in every standard region of the United Kingdom between May 1993 and May 1994.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest official figures for the numbers of unemployed in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* the Streatham parliamentary constituency; and what were the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on claimant unemployment is available from June 1983 and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. All figures are on the unadjusted basis.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest official figures for the numbers of unfilled vacancies in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* the Streatham parliamentary constituency; and what were the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Comparable information is available from September 1985, down to the level of jobcentre offices, and on the unadjusted basis only. It can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the people of the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of South Yorkshire placed in work by the Employment Service in the last 12 months were in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time, (i) temporary employment giving the period of time contracted for and (ii) permanent jobs; and what information he has on the proportion of these jobs which paid less than a half of the current average hourly rate.

Miss Widdecombe: In the 12 months to May 1994, the latest available period, it is estimated that about 80 per cent. of all those placed into employment by the Employment Service in the Doncaster and the Mexborough jobcentre office areas were placed into permanent jobs, the rest in temporary jobs of up to six months in duration. It is also estimated that about 70 per cent. of vacancies filled in the four quarters to April 1994 were for the full-time jobs, the remainder were for part-time jobs. No information is available on the rates of pay that these jobs attracted.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest unemployment figures available for *(a)* males and *(b)* females; and what these figures are for (i) Burnley, (ii) Lancashire, (iii) the north West and (iv) England.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest unadjusted claimant unemployment numbers and rates relate to 12 May 1994 and are given in the table:

	Males		*Females*	
	Number	*Rate per cent.*	*Number*	*Rate per cent.*
Burnley TTWA[1]	2,629	10·7	644	3·2
Lancashire	39,326	10·7	10,813	3·7
North West	230,525	13·7	63,481	4·8
England	1,691,942	12·6	513,200	5·0

[1]Travel-to-work area.

Barnsley/Doncaster TEC

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list what training opportunities for disabled persons there are at the Barnsley/Doncaster training and enterprise council.

Miss Widdecombe: The training programmes open to people with disabilities are training for work and youth training. Disabled people are exempt from eligibility rules for these programmes.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the age, sex and the number of persons currently undergoing training at the Barnsley/Doncaster training and enterprise council; and what were the figures in each year since its inception.

Miss Widdecombe: Details of age groups are not collected and are therefore unavailable. Information by sex is shown in the table:

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
Youth training starts			
1991-92 (actual—part-year only)	465	337	802
1992-93 (actual)	3,183	2,432	5,615
1993-94 (actual)	2,781	2,224	5,005
Adult training—training for work			
1991-92 (actual—part-time only)	1,278	577	1,855
1992-93 (actual)	4,003	1,591	5,594
1993-94 (actual)	7,298	2,647	9,945

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled persons have been trained at the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC since its inception; and of these, how many received employment on completion.

Miss Widdecombe: Since the training and enterprise council's inception a total of 559 people with disabilities have started training; of these, 271—48 per cent.—have secured employment.

University Graduates

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of *(a)* Welsh, *(b)* Scottish, *(c)* Northern Irish and *(d)* English graduates secured full-time employment within one year of graduation in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The table shows the percentage of first degree graduates who were in employment at the end of the calendar year in which they graduated, according to the location of their university. It is based on surveys published by the Universities' Statistical Record and excludes graduates from the former polytechnics and central institutions which received university status from 1992 onwards. Information is not available on the employment status of graduates one year after graduation, and on whether they are in full or part-time employment.

Per cent.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Wales	50·1	39·9	36·3	40·8
Scotland	56·9	48·7	45·0	45·3
Northern Ireland	52·8	50·3	45·4	45·8
England	57·0	50·6	47·5	49·4

Trade Unionists

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of trade unionists in 1979, 1985, 1990 and 1993 as declared to the certification officer.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand from the certification officer, an independent statutory officer, that the numbers collated from the annual returns to him for the following years were as follows:

	Numbers
1979	13,212,354
1985	10,818,949
1990	9,810,019

The membership figures for 1993 will be collated from the annual returns submitted to the certification officer during 1994. These will be published in his annual report for 1994, which will be available in April-May 1995.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what decisions his Department have taken in respect of TECs in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's other involvement with TECs over the same period.

Miss Widdecombe: Every year the Department agrees objectives and resources for Training and Enterprise Councils in training, enterprise and vocational education.

Over the past 12 months, we have introduced new arrangements to measure TEC performance and secure continuous improvement. These are the publication of inter-TEC comparison tables and the development of a new longer-term contractual framework.

We have also emphasised the role of TECs as key private sector partners for the full range of economic development and regeneration activities through publication of new strategic guidance from six Government Departments.

National Union of Teachers

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action the certification officer has taken to satisfy himself as to the accuracy of the annual returns from the National Union of Teachers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand from the certification officer, an independent statutory officer, that in assessing the accuracy of the annual returns from any union, and in the absence of any complaint from a member, he relies on the report of the appropriately qualified auditor which must form part of the return.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the annual returns from the National Union of Teachers have been supplied on time each year since 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Section 32 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 requires that a trade union shall submit an annual return to the certification officer before 1 June in the calendar year

following that to which it relates. I understand from the certification officer, an independent statutory officer, that of the nine returns submitted by the National Union of Teachers since 1985, three were submitted by 1 June, four within the month of June, and the remaining two in the month of July.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the numerical strength of the National Union of Teachers as agreed by the certification officer for each year since 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand from the certification officer, an independent statutory officer, that the total number of members shown on the annual returns submitted to him by the National Union of Teachers for each year since 1985 were as follows:

	Number
1985	253,672
1986	229,601
1987	224,538
1988	216,614
1989	213,482
1990	218,194
1991	214,675
1992	213,656
1993	232,243

Skills Training Agency

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he has made to notify former Skills Training Agency employees of the extension to the preferential reinstatement arrangements for staff employed by Astra Training Services Ltd.

Miss Widdecombe: The decision to extend the preferential reinstatement arrangements for staff employed by Astra Training Services was announced to Parliament on 17 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *427*. Those staff employed by Astra Training Services who had already been in touch with the Department inquiring about prospects for reinstatement were informed personally of the extension. The departmental trade unions were notified formally on 25 January and their assistance sought to ensure that those affected were made aware of the announcement.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a breakdown of the numbers and grades of former Skills Training Agency employees who have applied for preferential reinstatement to the Department of Employment since 1 January and the numbers and grades of those who have consequently been reinstated; and whether he will extend the arrangements for a further period.

Miss Widdecombe: The preferential reinstatement terms gave former Astra staff the right to consideration for posts within reasonable travelling distance of their home. Applications for reinstatement have been handled locally and no central register maintained. The information requested is not readily available, but I will write to the hon. Member in due course. When the extension was agreed it was anticipated that only a very small number of former Skills Training Agency staff were likely to benefit from these arrangements. I do know that some have done so. Although the period of the extension has now expired, the Department will continue to seek to find posts under the preferential terms until the end of the year for those who applied before the expiry date.

Job Finders' Grant

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evaluation he has done of the job finders' grant pilots being run in the east midlands and parts of the west midlands.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The job finders' grant pilots will be evaluated by an independent research company. A contract has been awarded for this study and work on the evaluation has begun.

Building and Construction Industry

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the incidence of accidents in the building and construction industry *(a)* in the first week of a new site and *(b)* on established sites.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is not possible to distinguish between *(a)* and *(b)* because information reported to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 does not contain the length of time a site has operated. The table provides overall recent trends in incidence rates for the construction industry for both employees and self-employed workers.

Incidence rates[1] for employees and self-employed persons working within the construction industry[2] as reported to all health and safety commission/executive enforcing authorities

	1990-91[3]	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Fatal			
Employed	9·3	8·8	8·0
Self-employed	3·9	2·5	4·0
Major injury			
Employed	281·5	272·4	239·3
Self-employed	129·7	112·5	105·7
Over three-day			
Employed	1,616·2	1,588·7	1,328·8
Self-employed	216·4	190·0	199·5
All reported			
Employed	1,907·0	1,869·8	1,576·1
Self-employed	350·0	304·9	309·3

[1] Incidence rates expressed per 100,000 workers.
[2] As defined by 1980 Standard Industrial Classification division 5.
[3] Years commencing 1 April.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to publish their advice to Government.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which have a statutory base.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The National Advisory Council on the Employment of Disabled People and the local

committees for the employment of people with disabilities, of which there are 60 in England, Scotland and Wales, were established by the Disabled Persons Employment Act 1944.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to produce annual reports;

(2) if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are required to lay their annual reports before Parliament.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to consult prior to legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish their responses to advice supplied by them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None, although the Department voluntarily consults these bodies as appropriate.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the advisory bodies which he has set up in his Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Health and Safety

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's timetable for introducing the CONDAM health and safety regulations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Health and Safety Commission have made proposals on the implementation of the design and management aspects of the European Council's Temporary or Mobile Construction Sites Directive. I am currently considering them and the representations that I have received.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 June 1994

HOME DEPARTMENT

Naturalisation

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applicants for naturalisation, who had not been free of immigration conditions for 12 months at the time of their application, were granted British passports in 1992, 1993 and so far this year;

(2) how many sportsmen and women who applied for naturalisation and had not been free of immigration conditions for 12 months at the time of their application, were granted British passports in 1992, 1993 and so far this year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not recorded.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances an applicant for naturalisation is granted a British passport within 12 months of being granted indefinite leave to remain.

Mr. Charles Wardle: An applicant for naturalisation who is not married to a British citizen is normally expected to have been free of immigration time restrictions, but there is discretion to waive this requirement in the special circumstances of any particular case. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of all the circumstances in which this discretion would be exercised in favour of an applicant, but we would consider doing so where the 12-months period has been missed by only a few months, provided that the other naturalisation requirements were met in full and that the applicant had well-established links with this country. We are normally prepared to overlook more than this only if there exist compelling reasons of a business or compassionate nature. We will also exercise this discretion if, at the time the application is considered and is otherwise in order, the 12-month period has been completed.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it takes to process an application for naturalisation; and what targets have been set in terms of upper time limits.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Average waiting times for certificates of naturalisation in May 1994 were 15 months. No upper time limits for completing the consideration of applications are set, but we aim to process all applications as expeditiously as possible while ensuring that the statutory requirements for naturalisation are met. The target is to reduce average waiting times to below 12 months.

Police Firearms

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the result of the inquiry carried out by the Lancashire police force into the recent loss, and recovery in Blackburn town centre, of police revolvers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that disciplinary proceedings are being taken against a police officer.

Firearms

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes involving the use of firearms were committed in each of the past five years.

Mr. Maclean: Figures of notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", copies of which can be found in the Library—latest edition, 1992, Cm 2410, table 3.1.

Figures for 1993 are not yet available.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of firearms held on certificate *(a)* at present and *(b)* one year ago.

Mr. Maclean: Estimates of the number of firearms held on certificate are published in paragraph 4 of Home Office statistical bulletins "Firearm Certificates Statistics, England and Wales". Copies for 1991 and 1992 can be found in the Library.

Figures for 1993 are not yet available.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information on the number of contracts let by the Home Office to each listed company for the specified consultancies and the total sum paid to each company for 1988 to 1991 and 1992-93 is given in the table. Information for the years prior to 1988-89 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultant	*Privatisation*	*Market Testing*	*Management advice*	*Accounting*	*Audit*	*Consultancy*	*Other services*	*Total sum £*
1988-1991								
Coopers & Lybrand		1			1	3	3	822,331
KPMG Peat Marwick						3		303,145
Ernst and Young		1	2	1		3		614,610

Consultant	Privatisation	Market Testing	Management advice	Accounting	Audit	Consultancy	Other services	Total sum £
Price Waterhouse						4		1,731,981
Arthur Andersen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Touche Ross						7	1	779,700
Grant Thornton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Robson Rhodes	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pannell Kerr Forster	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1992-1993								
Coopers & Lybrand		1				1		145,000
KPMG Peat Marwick		1						*
Ernst and Young						6	1	463,064
Price Waterhouse		2				1	1	311,760
Arthur Andersen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Touche Ross		2				6		300,335
Grant Thornton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Robson Rhodes				1				*
Pannell Kerr Forster	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

* Individual contract values are not given on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Racially Motivated Attacks

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the reported number of racially motivated attacks by white people on non-white people within the Greater London area in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: Figures are not collected centrally on the ethnic origin of perpetrators of racial attacks in relation to the ethnic origin of their victims.

The number of white offenders in cases where there has been an arrest and the number of non-white victims of racial attacks recorded by the Metropolitan police service in the last three years are set out in the table. It cannot be assumed that white people were the offenders in all attacks involving non-white victims.

	1991	1992	1993
White offender	90	106	88
Non-white victim	424	430	495

Attacks are classified as incidents of violence against the person.

Information on the ethnic origin of offenders was not collected before 1991.

Police (Performance-related Pay)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the studies and research findings on which he based his decision to introduce a system of performance-related pay for senior police officers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend took account of the argument in support of relating pay to overall performance contained in the report of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards. But the most influential factor in the Government's decision to introduce performance-related pay for all ranks in the police service was the benefit it will bring to the police service itself. Distinguishing especially good performance from the average performance provides an incentive to people to improve the effectiveness of their contribution, bringing added benefit to both the organisation and the individual, and is a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the extent to which a small number of offenders commit a disproportionate number of offences, the percentage *(a)* of each age group and *(b)* of the total population that such a group constitutes and the percentage (i) of crime committed by the age group and (ii) of total crime committed in England and Wales that is attributable to such a group.

Mr. Maclean: The information in the following table is taken from a birth cohort study using the "Offenders Index":

Table: Offenders born in 1953: Estimated[1] percentage of the population convicted[2] of six or more offences, at selected ages, and the percentage of the total number of convictions[3] of those born in 1953 attributable to these offenders

England and Wales — *Percentages*

Offenders with six or more convictions[2]	Under 17	Under 21	Age under 26	Under 31	Under 36
MALES					
Percentage of male population born in 1953	1	3	5	6	6
Percentage of convictions of those born in 1953	30	47	56	60	62

Offenders with six or more convictions[2]	*Under 17*	*Under 21*	*Age under 26*	*Under 31*	*Under 36*
FEMALES					
Percentage of female population born in 1953	[3]—	0·1	0·2	0·3	0·3
Percentage of convictions of those born in 1953	6	11	18	23	27

[1] Based on the conviction histories of all offenders born in four selected weeks in 1953.
[2] For 'standard list' offences, ie all indictable and triable either way offences and certain summary offences.
[3] Indicates less than 0·05 per cent.

United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. has been subject to a financial penalty due to the late delivery of a prisoners or prisoners resulting in the need to accommodate prisoners elsewhere; and what was the financial penalty on each occasion.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 28 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of cases in which United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. have been subject to a financial penalty due to the late delivery of a prisoner or prisoners resulting in the need to accommodate the prisoners elsewhere.

There have been no cases in which United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. have been subject to a financial penalty due to the late delivery of a prisoner or prisoners.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the Home Office has paid United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. for additional journeys or out-of-area journeys in respect of its contract to run Blakenhurst prison; and what was the amount paid on each occasion.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 28 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of times the Home Office has paid United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. for additional journeys or out of area journeys in respect of their contract to run Blakenhurst Prison; and the amount paid on each occasion.

No additional payments have been made to United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. for additional journeys or our of area journeys.

Prisoner Escapes

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from prisons in England and Wales on each day from 17 to 20 June; and if he will list the number of prisoners involved in each escape, the prisons from which they escaped, and whether they have been recaptured.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 28 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about escape statistics during the period 17-20 June.

During this period, one prisoner escaped from HMYOI Wetherby. No-one else is believed to have been involved. The prisoner concerned returned to Wetherby on 22 June 1994.

Full Sutton Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the disturbance at HMP Full Sutton on the weekend of 17-19 June; what damage occurred; what is the estimated cost of that damage; and what injuries there were to *(a)* staff and *(b)* inmates.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 28 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the disturbance at HMP Full Sutton on the weekend of 17th-19th June; what damage occurred; what is the estimated cost of that damage and what injuries there were to *(a)* staff and *(b)* inmates.

No disturbance took place at Full Sutton on the weekend of 17th-19th June. The only recorded incidents which took place during that period were two minor fires in prisoners' cells which occurred separately. No injuries were sustained by either staff or inmates and the damage caused to clothes, bedding and a single item of furniture were negligible in value. In both cases these small fires were extinguished by staff before the arrival of the fire brigade.

TREASURY

Crown Estate

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether nature conservation orders made under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 apply to land owned or leased by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is applicable to Crown lands, including the Crown Estate, as set out in section 67 of the Act.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions taken within the last three years by the Crown Estate Commission has had

"regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside"

as required under section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The policies of the Crown Estate Commissioners on environmental issues are set out in their statement "Stewardship in Action". Activities associated with these policies are described in the annual reports submitted to Parliament each year by the commissioners. Copies of these documents have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much foreshore land is owned by the Crown Estate; and how much land owned by the Crown Estate is leased to *(a)* shooting organisations, *(b)* conservation bodies and *(c)* other bodies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Crown Estate owns about half the foreshore in the United Kingdom. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, this amounts to some 1,600 miles of which the shooting rights have been leased on about 130 miles, and 480 miles have been leased to conservation bodies. The remainder of leased foreshore —very little is not leased—is let, mainly to local authorities and port and harbour authorities. In Scotland there is a public right to shoot, so that no shooting rights are leased. There, 3,100 miles of foreshore are owned by the Crown Estate of which 84 miles are leased to conservation bodies and 470 to other bodies, mainly local authorities, ports and harbours.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responsibilities the Crown Estate Commissioners have for wildlife conservation on land that they own or lease.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Crown Estate Commissioners have a duty under the provisions of the Crown Estate Act 1961 to maintain and enhance the value of the estate and the return obtained from it, but with due regard to the requirements of good management. Within this framework the commissioners are committed to an overall objective of balancing environmental with commercial and other needs in order to achieve effective stewardship. Strategies to support this objective are in place in each business group, but more particularly in the agricultural and marine estates, where wildlife conservation is a high priority. More specifically, the commissioners co-operate fully in the work of statutory agencies responsbible for the protection of wildlife in designated areas—for example, sites of special scientific interest and marine nature reserves. Full details of the policy of commissioners are set out in "Stewardship in Action", which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

United Artists (Cable Laying)

Mr. Amess: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of whether United Artists is fulfilling the terms of its licence to install fibre optic cables in the Basildon area and that the criteria for siting of junction boxes is in accordance with the terms of the licence.

Mr. McLoughlin: Regulatory responsibility for ensuring that United Artists fulfills the terms of its build programme rests with Oftel and it is content that the company is meeting its build obligations. The standard of the company's street works and the siting of junction boxes are Highway Authority matters. United Artists' licence includes conditions designed to ensure that the company operates in a responsible manner and adheres to all relevant street works legislation. Street works in the maintainable highway are subject to the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, and its associated regulations, which are enforced by local highway authorities. The company's licence permits it to install junction boxes subject to certain conditions. The company is required to agree guidelines with the planning and highway authorities on the positioning of its above-ground apparatus. It is also required to inform the local authority of its intention to install apparatus and identify where they propose to place the apparatus so that the local authority have an opportunity to make conditions on the siting of the junction box. I have not received any evidence to suggest that junction boxes are not being sited in accordance with licence terms.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will visit the Royal Mail sorting office at Queensferry, Deeside, Clwyd.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have no plans at present to visit Queensferry post office sorting office.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the Insolvency Service for closure of files *(a)* before 8 July and *(b)* for 1994.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The majority of the Department's agencies are set annual targets. For 1994-95 the Insolvency Service has been set the target of reducing the number of its open cases to a level equivalent to approximately 12 months' input. This will result in the closure of 53,000 cases.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of the increased number of insolvency completions on the detection of fraud and the prosecution and disqualification of delinquent company directors.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Although some specialist resource will be diverted to assist the process of increased case completions, the Insolvency Service still anticipates that it will devote some 25 per cent. more manpower resource to prosecution and disqualification activity in 1994-95 then in 1993-94.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much extra funding is being allocated to the Insolvency Service in the current year for *(a)* file closure and *(b)* fraud investigation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A total of £1·831 million has been allocated to the service from my Department's running

costs for 1994-95 to fund the additional work required to meet the case closure target of 53,000. The additional allocation provided in relation to fraud investigation for 1994-95 is £1 million.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the cost to the Insolvency Service of employing private sector secondees.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: For 1994-95 the estimated cost of employing private sector secondees and/or of engaging other private sector resources on a short-term basis will be £1·12 million.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy on the investigation by the Insolvency Service of potential offences or possible areas of investigation when reviewing whether insolvencies can be completed; and what are the reasons for this policy.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The investigation of an insolvency or the consideration of possible offences can be and often is conducted independently of its administration. Where, in reviewing a case with a view to the conclusion of the administration, matters are identified which, prima facie, require further investigation those matters receive full consideration.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his assessment of how the Insolvency Service's recent investigation in the local office information system will assist *(a)* the mechanical processing work of the service and *(b)* the investigation work of the service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Insolvency Service's investment in LOIS—local office information system—links a relational database to office automation software. The system assists official receivers in streamlining case administration, particularly in the document production area; and it will provide management with additional information relevant to the allocation of resources and monitoring of performance.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what effect increases in the rate of closure of files by the Insolvency Service will have on checks for fraud and prosecution of fraudulent directors.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: None. The additional cases to be closed in 1994-95 will already have been vetted for any requirement for further investigation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many private sector secondees are currently on loan to the Insolvency Service; and what work they are doing.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A total of five private secondees are currently in post in the Insolvency Service and a further two are due to start on 4 July 1994. Three of the secondees are working in the disqualification unit on disqualification matters and two are working in official receivers' offices assisting examiners. The two secondees due to start on 4 July 1994 will be working in the disqualification unit on disqualification matters.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Insolvency Service targets are affected by the completion of extra insolvencies in the current financial year; and to what extent.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: None.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations underlie the allocation of time in the Insolvency Service between mechanical processing work and core investigation functions.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A minimum amount of routine administration work has to be done on each insolvency. The Insolvency Service seeks to devote the minimum level of resource to such work consistent with a proper discharge of official receivers' statutory duty so that it can maximise the resource devoted to its investigative role.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps have been taken to implement the recommendations of the 18th report of 1993-94 from the Public Accounts Committee on the Insolvency Service executive agency and company director disqualifications.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Government's response to the 18th report of the Committee of Public Accounts on the Insolvency Service executive agency and company director disqualifications will be published in due course.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many officials have been to the Insolvency Service on six-month contracts since the establishment of the service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: None.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many disqualification proceedings are expected to be issued in the current financial year, identifying those proceedings initiated by insolvency practitioners and those by the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: There is no target for the number of disqualification proceedings to be issued. On present information, it would appear likely that in 1994-95 between 750 and 800 disqualification proceedings will be commenced, of which between 60 per cent. and 70 per cent. are likely to relate to cases reported on by insolvency practitioners while the remainder will relate to cases dealt with by official receivers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase the prosecution rate for inadequate accounting records by the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The allocation and deployment of additional investigative resources will enable the Insolvency Service to increase the number of reports produced identifying criminal offences, including those relating to a failure to maintain adequate accounting records.

Company Directors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his plans to increase the conviction rate of directors who have traded fraudulently.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Prosecutions by my Department for fraudulent trading resulted in 11 convictions in 1991-92, 24 convictions in 1992-93 and 32 convictions in 1993-94. In relation to offences of fraudulent trading, as

with other prosecutions for which it is responsible, my Department's practice is to prosecute offenders wherever there is a realistic prospect of a conviction, where the other criteria in the code for Crown prosecutors are satisfied and where bringing such charges will enable the prosecution to put before the court an accurate picture of the defendant's wrongdoing as a whole.

These criteria will remain the basis for prosecution decisions.

Pulp and Paper

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made as to the adequacy of the supply of home-produced or imported pulp and paper for packaging and production; and if he will publish a table showing *(a)* United Kingdom production, imports and net home disposals of pulp and paper by end-use in each month this year to date compared to 1989, *(b)* the rate of return on capital required to make it profitable for United Kingdom pulp and paper manufacturers to invest in new capacity in the United Kingdom at current rates of exchange and *(c)* the actual rates of return on replacement and historic cost in 1993.

Mr. McLoughlin: Estimates of the supply of pulp and paper for packaging and production are a matter for industry. Official statistics on manufacturers sales, imports and exports are published annually by the Central Statistical Office in Business Monitor PAS4710. Copies of this publication are available in the Library of the House. There are no official data on rates of return, but information may be available from commercial organisations which analyse company accounts.

AGIP (Africa) Ltd.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what transactions his Department has had with AGIP (Africa) Ltd.

Mr. Needham: My oil and gas projects and supplies office has not had any transactions with AGIP (Africa) Ltd.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what decisions his Department has taken in respect of TECs over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement with TECs over the same period.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has developed an increasingly close working relationship with the TEC movement over the last 12 months. We have placed particular emphasis on their role in bringing together Business Link partnerships in each local area and the importance of completing the national Business Link network by the end of 1995.

The Government's White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" and our strategic guidance to TECs, published in May 1994, have both confirmed the importance of TECs working with other partners to agree strategies for business competitiveness and sustainable economic growth.

To support this work and provide a more secure basis for planning business support services, we have decided that, from 1 April 1995, DTI funding to TECs will be for a three-year period which will be rolled forward each year. However, three-year rolling funding will be available only to those TECs which have obtained a three-year licence from the Government office in their region and which can demonstrate satisfactory progress in establishing a Business Link.

Markets

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to change regulations relating to markets overt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: A Bill to abolish the rule of market overt, which has Government support, is at present before Parliament.

Standing Charges (Electricity)

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the regional electricity companies regarding their policies on *(a)* standing charges in general, *(b)* standing charges for prepayment meters and *(c)* where consumption is low; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I discuss a wide range of issues with representatives of the regional electricity companies from time to time. Electricity charges are primarily a matter for the companies themselves and for the Director General of Electricity Supply. I understand that the director general is currently considering the issue of standing charges as part of his review of the RECs' distribution price controls.

Pakistan (Trade Figures)

Mr. Parry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the trade figures between the United Kingdom and Pakistan over the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: Between 1989 and 1993 the value of United Kingdom exports to Pakistan increased at an annual rate of 9·7 per cent. while imports increased by 11·7 per cent.

Nigeria

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has concerning the current level of United Kingdom investment in Nigeria and in the Nigerian oil industry; and what steps he is taking to further the interests of British investors in Nigeria.

Mr. Needham: According to the latest available information, the book value of United Kingdom assets in Nigeria in 1992 was £476 million. The value of United Kingdom investment in the Nigerian oil industry was £324·6 million.

My Department is mounting a series of seminars entitled "Opportunity Africa" in conjunction with chambers of commerce around the United Kingdom which will feature Nigeria. We also plan to publish Nigerian market reports on ports management, power generation, agriculture and mining.

We continue to encourage inward British investment where there is a good prospect of repatriation of profits. There is at present a need for the Nigerian Government to provide an enabling environment for investment.

We continue to lobby for a change in the current Nigerian legislation which limits existing investors to a maximum of 40 per cent. foreign shareholding. Although Nigeria has abolished this restriction for new investors, it has refused to make any changes to the rule for established companies because of political sensitivities.

Nigeria

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current balance of trade between the United Kingdom and Nigeria; what were the comparable figures for each of the previous three years; and what particular steps he intends to take to encourage further improvements in United Kingdom trade with Nigeria.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* In 1993, the United Kingdom had a trade surplus with Nigeria worth £522 million. In 1991 and 1992, the trade surplus with Nigeria was worth £295 million and £455 million respectively.

As one of our major markets, Nigeria receives particular attention from my department in the key sectors of oil and gas, power generation and distribution, telecommunications, agriculture/water resources, ports management, mining equipment, railway equipment and pharmaceuticals.

EC Industry Council

Mr. Stephen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the EC Industry Council held in Luxembourg on 22 June.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Council had a general debate on the report of the Bangemann group on Europe and the Global Information Society which has been presented to the Corfu European Council. There was welcome emphasis on the role of the private sector, liberalisation and market forces in developing the information society.

Preliminary conclusions were adopted by the Council on the Commission's integrated programme in favour of small and medium-sized enterprises and the craft sector. This brings together existing measures and new proposals in favour of SME's within an overall framework. The Council agreed to complete its detailed examination of the programme by the end of the year.

The Council heard a report from the Commission on the progress of the OECD negotiations on shipbuilding subsidies and emphasised the importance of concluding these in July as long as the few outstanding issues could be resolved satisfactorily.

On steel, the Commission gave a progress report on the implementation of the article 95 state aid decisions approved in December 1993. In response to a request from the United Kingdom the Commission agreed to a minute statement that it would not hesitate to take action where breach of the article 95 decisions was established. The Commission also reported on progress being made with the restructuring plan for the Community's steel industry and informed the Council that, using its own powers under the steel aids code, it intended to permit Italy to give aid to assist capacity reductions among its private sector producers. The majority of the Council supported the Commission's approach. The United Kingdom was among those expressing reservations about the Commission's interpretation of the aids code, but we were able to obtain agreement to tighter conditions being attached to any aid granted. Member states will be consulted on resulting aid applications from Italy on a case-by-case basis.

Mahogany

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the sources within the Amazon rain forest area of the mahogany provided by Brazilian suppliers to the principal British importers.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* There are no official sources for information on the importation of Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom. The information has not been available since 1992 because the United Kingdom trade classification no longer separately identifies mahogany from several other non-coniferous woods.

Information on United Kingdom importing companies and Brazilian exporting companies is not available.

Illegal Arms Trading

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what knowledge the Government had of the activities of Mr. William Harper, Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Matson and Mr. Michael Aspin before their conviction in 1988 for illegal arms trading; and whether the Government had relevant information about these activities which was not revealed at the trial.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 17 June 1994]:* As far as can be ascertained, my Department had no knowledge of the activities of the three men.

European Regional Funds

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list each area in the United Kingdom that has been designated eligible for objective 5b status.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) on 22 February 1994, *Official Report,* column *173.*

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Broadcasting

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the terms of reference of the inquiry into the future of the BBC include the possibility of scrapping the BBC in its present form and the creation of a new and cheaper form of public service broadcasting.

Mr. Brooke: Our consultation document on the future of the BBC, published in November 1992, set out the key issues for consideration, including the range of the BBC's programmes and services and how they should be financed. I plan to publish a White Paper shortly, setting out our proposals.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many television licences were sold in 1993; how many unlicensed television sets were estimated to be operating in 1993; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the estimated cost, per annum, of identifying and prosecuting people who do not have a television licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Television licensing records relate to the number of licences in force, rather than the number of licences sold, and to the financial rather than the calendar year.

The number of licences in force at 31 March 1994 was 20·75 million. The estimated number of households with unlicensed television sets at that date was 1·61 million, and the estimated number with a black and white licence but a colour set was 570,700. The cost to the BBC of identifying and prosecuting television licence evaders in 1993-94 was £15·9 million.

Broadcasting

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will now make a statement on the future of the BBC charter.

Mr. Brooke: I plan to publish a White Paper very shortly.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will publish for each county in Wales, for each local authority in Wales and for Wales as a whole the numbers of people *(a)* able to claim concessions to their television licence fee and *(b)* currently claiming such concessions to their television licence in respect of being registered blind or partially sighted;

(2) what was the level of television licence fee for colour television users in each of the past 10 years; and what was the level of television licence fee concession paid to blind or partially blind people in the past 10 years.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* From March 1985 to March 1988 the colour television licence fee was £58. Since then, the fee has been increased annually each April as follows:

Year	*£*
1988	62·50
1989	66·00
1990	71·00
1991	77·00
1992	80·00
1993	83·00
1994	84·50

The reduction in the television licence fee for registered blind people has remained at £1·25 since separate radio licences were abolished in 1971.

I understand that the number of registered blind people in Wales at March 1993 was 9,595. It is not known how many of these own a television set. The number of people in Wales claiming the reduction for registered blind people is not available as records are not held in this form. Registered partially sighted people are not entitled to a reduction on their television licence fee on account of being partially sighted.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Ker Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services since his Department was created.

Mr. Sproat: Since my Department was established in April 1992, it has let contracts to the consultants listed as shown in the chart.

In addition, my Department has awarded a call-off contract to Touche Ross for audit services to be provided to its sponsored bodies. It has no minimum or maximum value and payment takes place between the sponsored body and Touche Ross.

Consultancy Description	*Purpose*[1]	*Value (£000's)*
(a) Coopers and Lybrand		
Review of Schools Library Services	vi	43·94
Innovation workshop in preparation for DNH National Seminar	vii	1·76
(b) KPMG Peat Marwick		
Evaluation Review of the European Co-production Fund	iii and vi	26·14
Evaluation Review of British Screen Finance	iii and vi	48·41
Study of contracting out in English public library authorities	vi	57·68
Assistance in preparation of DNH Performance Appraisal system	iii and vi	80·00
3 separate computer projects on behalf of The Royal Parks agency	vi	50·49
(c) Ernst and Young		
Review of market testing in the British Library	ii and vi	36·00
Review of facilities management in 16 museums and galleries		
Phase 1	iii and vi	4·50
Phase 2	iii and vi	60·00
Audit Services	v	11·00
Feasibility study into the development of a computerised database of the statutory list of historic buildings	iii and vi	62·00
(d) Price Waterhouse		
Review of the Arts Council	iii and vi	53·00
Financial audit of British Library Project following privatisation of PSA	v	131
(e) Arthur Anderson		
Nil	—	—
(f) Touche Ross		
TV Licence Fee consultancy to assess the BBC's revenue gains and advise on the level of fee for the next 3 years	vi	207·90
Management Review of the National Film and Television School	iii and vi	16·85
(g) Grant Thornton		
Nil	—	—
(h) Robson Rhodes		
Nil	—	—
(i) Parnell Kerr Forster		
Nil	—	—

[1] (i) Privatisation.
(ii) Market testing.
(iii) Management advice.
(iv) Accounting.
(v) Audit.
(vi) Consultancy.
(vii) Other services.

Museums

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what Government resources are allocated via museum bodies to assist with annual running costs of any museum; and what policy is used to determine such allocations.

Mr. Sproat: My Department's grant in aid to the Museums and Galleries Commission includes £1·02 million in 1994-95 towards the cost of supporting the Tyne and Wear museum service. My Department gives no other assistance towards the running costs of museums other than those museums it funds directly.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what decisions his Department has taken in respect of TECs over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement with TECs over the same period.

Mr. Sproat: My Department has taken no decisions in respect of TECs. The Department's only involvement has been to invite the appropriate TEC to attend each of the regional conferences which we are holding.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions will be held shortly between the World bank and the Government of Kenya about support for Kenya.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The World bank will be meeting donors and the Government of Kenya on 20 July.

African Development Bank

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the task force on project quality in the African development bank.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Know-how Fund

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the work of the know-how fund.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The know-how fund, Britain's programme of bilateral technical assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, now covers 24 countries in the region. Disbursements for 1993-94 were in the region of £61 million. A list of projects has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Yemen

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about Somali refugees in Yemen caught up in the civil war; and what efforts are being made by the United Nations and humanitarian organisations to take assistance to the Somali refugees.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There have been reports of over 170 fatalities and many more wounded in the Al Koud camp, east of Aden. Following negotiations with both parties to the conflict, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees evacuated the remaining refugees to safe areas. There is concern for the safety of Somali refugees in Aden itself. UNHCR is discussing with the local authorities the possibility of moving them to another location in Yemen.

To date the United Kingdom has responded by contributing £100,000 to the ICRC appeal and a further United States $50,000 has been chanelled through the International Organisation for Migration.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his Department's involvement with TECs.

Mr. David Davis: The Cabinet Office Office of Public Service and Science is involved with TECs in a number of ways.

First, it has made itself known to all TECs as the recognised industry training organisation for the civil service. It has adopted this role in support of its objective to encourage and support Departments and agencies in meeting the national targets for education and training. This role is publicised to TECs through guides issued by the National Council for Industry Training Organisations, of which the Cabinet Office (OPSS) is a member.

Secondly, the Cabinet Office organised seminars in London, Leeds, Cardiff and Edinburgh during 1993 as part of the programme of active support for the achievement of Investors in People across the civil service. The local TEC, or local enterprise company in the case of Edinburgh, was closely involved in the planning of each seminar, was consulted on likely local interest and supplied a speaker on each occasion.

Finally, in terms of domestic involvement with TECs, different parts of the Department have or will have direct contact with their local TEC as they make progress with their own commitment to the Investors in People initiative.

Child Support Act

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what limitations are placed on individuals employed in the civil service regarding campaigning to change the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Waldegrave: No specific rules or guidance have been issued on campaigning to change the Child Support Act 1991. Departments and agencies that have responsibilities under the Act may, however, require their staff to avoid public comment on Government policy in this area in accordance with chapter 4 of the personnel management section of the civil service management code.

Civil Service

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many non-European Union nationals are working for the British civil service in Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: All officials working in the EC institutions, including those on secondment from the United Kingdom civil service, work for those institutions. There are non-European Union nationals working for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Europe and for the United Kingdom civil service in this country, but their numbers could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the Government's policy on answering under the citizens charter questions from members of the public concerning Government policy and its effect where the information can be obtained from the Central Statistical Office databank on payment to an outside contractor.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's policy under the citizens charter of extending access to official information is supported by the code of practice on access to Government information. The code does not, however, require Departments to provide information which is provided as part of an existing charged service other than through that service. Any data on the CSO databank can be obtained directly from the CSO as well as from outside contractors.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Arable Subsidy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by county the amount of European Union arable subsidy received for the latest year for which figures are available; and what were the figures for each of the past four years.

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 14 June, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*. The arable area payments scheme was introduced in 1992 and first payments were made in 1993. There are no comparable figures for previous years.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to provide the information except at disproportionate cost. Figures are available, however, on a financial year basis, from 1989 under the categories of general management consultancy, information technology, privatisation—including market testing, and next steps agencies—including prior options studies, and are as follows:

1989-90 Number of contracts per firm per category

	Gen. MGT CON.	*IT.*	*Privatisation (Includes Market Testing)*	*Next steps (includes prior option studies)*
Coopers and Lybrand	33	44	2	0
KPMG Peat Marwick	13	1	0	0
Ernst and Young	18	0	0	0
Price Waterhouse	24	1	1	0
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0
Touche Ross	24	3	5	0
Grant Thornton	0	0	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0	0	0
Contracts Total	112	49	8	0

Total amount of spend by 9 listed Consultancy groups £2,239,941.

1990-91 Number of contracts per firm per category

	Gen. MGT CON.	*IT.*	*Privatisation (Includes Market Testing)*	*Next steps (includes prior option studies)*
Coopers and Lybrand	28	29	1	1
KPMG Peat Marwick	7	1	0	0
Ernst and Young	14	1	0	0
Price Waterhouse	28	1	0	0
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0
Touche Ross	5	0	0	0
Grant Thornton	0	0	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0	0	0
Contracts Total	82	32	1	1

Total amount of spend by 9 listed Consultancy groups £2,200,062.

1991-92 Number of contracts per firm per category

	Gen. MGT CON.	IT.	Privatisation (Includes Market Testing)	Next steps (includes prior option studies)
Coopers and Lybrand	38	26	0	3
KPMG Peat Marwick	14	1	0	2
Ernst and Young	17	1	0	0
Price Waterhouse	22	1	1	0
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0
Touche Ross	13	10	1	0
Grant Thornton	0	0	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0	0	0
Contracts Total	104	39	2	5

Total amount of spend by 9 listed Consultancy groups £2,426,719.

1992-93 Number of contracts per firm per category

	Gen. MGT CON.	IT.	Privatisation (Includes Market Testing)	Next steps (includes prior option studies)
Coopers and Lybrand	27	13	0	1
KPMG Peat Marwick	8	1	0	0
Ernst and Young	14	0	0	0
Price Waterhouse	21	0	0	1
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0
Touche Ross	21	6	2	1
Grant Thornton	0	0	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0	0	0
Contracts Total	91	20	2	3

Total amount of spend by 9 listed Consultancy groups £3,118,228.

1993-94 Number of contracts per firm per category

	Gen. MGT CON.	IT.	Privatisation (Includes Market Testing)	Next steps (includes prior option studies)
Coopers and Lybrand	39	2	4	0
KPMG Peat Marwick	14	0	0	1
Ernst and Young	20	0	0	0
Price Waterhouse	22	1	3	1
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0
Touche Ross	38	3	4	0
Grant Thornton	0	0	0	0
Robson Rhodes	0	0	0	0
Pannell Kerr Forster	0	0	0	0
Contracts Total	133	6	11	2

Total amount of spend by 9 listed Consultancy groups £2,743,931.

Obscene Publications Branch

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the role in the Province of the obscene publications branch of Scotland Yard.

Sir John Wheeler: The obscene publications branch of New Scotland Yard has no operational role in Northern Ireland. Criminal investigations into breaches of the obscenity laws are a matter for the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have died from skin cancern in Northern Ireland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Year	Deaths from skin cancer
1979	27
1980	33
1981	39
1982	35
1983	31
1984	35
1985	41
1986	38
1987	29
1988	32
1989	30
1990	47
1991	28
1992	34

Figures for 1993 are not yet available.

TRANSPORT

Roadworthiness Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the last financial year the number of spot checks carried out on heavy goods vehicles, the number of immediate prohibitions, delayed prohibitions and defect notices issued.

Mr. Key: The table gives the information for roadworthiness spot checks.

1993-94

	Number
Heavy Goods Vehicles and HGV Trailers	134,266
Immediate Prohibitions	8,951
Delayed Prohibitions	10,068
Defect Notices	18,206

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what studies his Department has commissioned into the effect on traffic congestion of the use by heavy goods vehicles of the inside three lanes on four-lane motorways;

(2) what discussions he has had with motoring organisations regarding the use by heavy goods vehicles of the inside three lanes on four-lane motorways.

Mr. Key: I have commissioned no specific studies of the use made by heavy goods vehicles of different lanes on four-lane motorways nor have I consulted motoring organisations on this subject.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to promote the use of low or zero-emission vehicles for public transport services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to promote the use of low or zero-emission public transport service vehicles to improve air quality in cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: There are no plans to promote low or zero-emission vehicles specifically for public transport services. However, the Department of Transport, in recognition of the contribution that motor vehicles make to urban pollution, will continue to set increasingly stringent emission standards for all motor vehicle categories. We are also conducting research to evaluate the role that alternative fuels and control technologies could play in minimising vehicle emissions.

Last March, I announced a £1·2 million collaborative project involving the Departments of Transport, Trade and Industry, and Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to trial alternative fuels. This project will compare panel vans and urban buses using compressed natural gas, liquid petroleum gas, electricity and biodiesel with conventional fuels. Sixteen buses are being converted using funds exceeding £200,000 from local authority budgets, £116,000 of which was allocated by the Department of Transport.

In parallel studies, the Department is assessing the effectiveness of various emission control technologies, including particulate traps, that could also help achieve lower emissions.

MV Derbyshire

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to complete his investigation of the facts presented to him by the chief inspector of marine accidents following receipts of the evidence and footage from Oceaneering Technologies in respect of the wreck of the Derbyshire, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: It is too early to say when the examination of the material by the marine accident investigation branch will be complete to enable the chief inspector to be in a position to advise my right hon. Friend on the course of action which should be followed.

Automatic Train Protection

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received British Rail's report on automatic train protection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Sir Bob Reid has sent my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a report setting out the results of the BR's work evaluating the technical trials, costs and benefits of ATP systems. No decisions have yet been taken on implementation. My right hon. Friend has asked the Health and Safety Commission and Railtrack for their views on the report. The HSC's advice is expected in the autumn.

The report's findings will be made available by Railtrack in the next few weeks. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Rail Franchising Director

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what directions he has given to the Franchising Director in respect of payment of subsidy, where services do not operate.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend has given no directions to the Franchising Director on this issue.

London Underground (Fires)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fires have occurred *(a)* on London Underground property and *(b)* in London Underground stations in each of the last 10 years; which stations they were in; and how many of them involved escalators.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The information is not held in the form requested. Figures are readily available only from 1990 onwards, and are not held for individual stations.

Confirmed Fire Incidents on London Underground 1990 to date

Year	In Stations (excluding escalators)	On Escalators	Other Property (track and rolling stock)	Total
1990	658	136	1,830	2,624
1991	80	73	993	1,146
1992	59	46	525	630
1993	56	11	365	432
1994 to date	13	5	52	70

Safety

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department gives to value-for-money performance indicators for transport safety measures; and what research has been undertaken by his Department into such indicators.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* My Department strongly supports the use of value-for-money criteria in the consideration of transport safety measures and the need for systematic assessment of costs and benefits in the introduction of safety legislation. A range of research has been commissioned by the Department into the valuation of safety benefits, particularly in relation to road safety. The public transport operators also commission research in which the Department takes a close interest.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions officials of his Department have had with the National Audit Office concerning value-for-money performance indicators for transport safety measures.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* Officials from my Department participated in the National Audit Office seminar in July 1993 and have more recently had a number of informal discussions on performance measures for transport safety.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions are given to public inquiries after transport disasters regarding *(a)* the prioritisation of any recommendation produced by such inquiries and *(b)* the estimation of the costs of implementing any recommendations produced by such inquiries.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The Department believes it important that consideration is given to the costs as well as the likely benefits of implementing any recommendations produced by public inquiries after major transport disasters. This is reflected in the terms of reference of Lord Donaldson's inquiry into the prevention of pollution from merchant shipping which required that due consideration should be given to the economic implications of any new measures. The Department attaches importance to ensuring that any future inquiries also include this requirement. The Department has not issued specific instructions about the prioritisation of recommendations.

Air Misses

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the number of category A air misses between civilian and military aircraft for each year since 1989.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* According to the information supplied by the National Air Traffic Services' joint air miss section, the number of category A air misses between civilian and military aircraft for each year since 1989, are as follows:

Year	Total
1989	12
1990	12
1991	8
1992	9
1993	4

PRIME MINISTER

Government Ministers

Q9. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to reducing the total number of Government Ministers.

The Prime Minister: None.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the legislative measures for the benefit of disabled people which were introduced during the period that he served as Minister with responsibility for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: During the relatively short period when I was Minister for disabled people—September 1986 to June 1987—the Government introduced a number of legislative measures, including those which improved local authority services for disabled people bringing them additional rights of assessment; requiring authorities to consider the needs of carers; and improving information and consultation.

Since I became Prime Minister disabled people have benefited from many more important initiatives such as the introduction of the disability living and working allowances, the access-to-work scheme and improvements to promote the integration of disabled pupils within mainstream schools. I have also made clear our commitment to do still more.

Corfu Summit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals on environmental protection the United Kingdom has submitted to the European Union Heads of Government summit in Corfu.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom did not submit any specific environmental protection matters for discussion.

Japan (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what communications he has had with his Japanese counterpart, Mr. Hata, in regard to his statement to the Japanese Diet on 17 June that Japan has the capacity to build nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office today.

Value Added Tax

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions he has made statements in the House on whether he had plans to increase value added tax, both in terms of scope and rate, since he assumed office.

The Prime Minister: I have made statements in the House concerning VAT on numerous occasions, details of which are available in the Library of the House.

AGIP (Africa) Ltd.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether he will appoint an independent committee, like that of Lord Justice Scott, to investigate all aspects of money laundering by AGIP (Africa) Ltd;

(2) whether, further to his correspondence with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, he has initiated inquiries into money laundering involving AGIP (Africa) Ltd.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales investigated the allegations of misconduct on the part of its members and concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify bringing a disciplinary case against them.

Union Flag (Public Buildings)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Prime Minister what action he will take to promote the presence of the Union flag in Government and local government offices, institutions and law courts.

The Prime Minister: The Union flag is flown on Government buildings on approximately 20 occasions each year at Her Majesty's command to highlight days of national celebration. Other than that there are no restrictions; local authorities and other organisations are free to display the Union flag as often as they wish, both inside and outside their buildings. While I have no plans to regulate further the display of the Union flag I would welcome its more frequent use as a symbol of our national pride and unity.

Roberto Calvi

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what inquiries he has made in connection with the Banco Ambrosiano official Roberto Calvi.

The Prime Minister: None. The circumstances of Mr. Calvi's death were fully investigated by the police.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 June.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Jill Rutter

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister in what grade Ms Jill Rutter is employed as a civil servant; and what are her responsibilities.

The Prime Minister: Ms Rutter is a grade 5 civil servant, seconded to the policy unit from Her Majesty's Treasury. Her responsibilities cover transport, among a range of other issues.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister in what capacity Ms Jill Rutter attended a meeting of the Railtrack board on 17 June; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Ms Rutter has never attended a Railtrack board meeting. On Friday 17 June, she attended a meeting of officials at the Department of Transport, at the invitation of Department of Transport officials, part of which was attended by some Railtrack employees.

EDUCATION

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *502*, what is his current policy on the holdback of grants from the Further Education Funding Council; and whether the grant will be paid to the council to allow it discretion over payments to the individual colleges when they have satisfied its conditions.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend's policy on this matter is unchanged. He will reach a decision in due course.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to prevent colleges of further and higher education from withholding *(a)* pay increases, *(b)* references, *(c)* in-service training and *(d)* special benefits to those seeking early retirement and other means of pressure on to staff who refuse to sign the College Employers' Forum contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: It is for each college to decide what action it will take in respect of the introduction of new contracts.

Student Loans

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations he has received in the last two years on the subject of student loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Since June 1992 my right hon. Friend has received 175 letters from hon. Members and members of

the public on the subject of student loans. In addition my right hon. Friend has received a number of letters on the issue of student support generally. It is not possible to say how many of these mentioned student loans.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will establish a permanent organisation for investigation of accusations in respect of *(a)* nepotism, *(b)* preferential contract deals, *(c)* conflicts of interest and *(d)* other forms of corruption by principals and governors of colleges of further and higher education and universities; and how many investigations of individual colleges he has ordered to date.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend sees no need for a permanent organisation for the investigation of complaints.

In the case of an institution in the further education sector my right hon. Friend may intervene under section 57 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 in the event of mismanagement, on the advice of the Further Education Funding Council, or breach of duty. He has requested the FEFC to carry out investigations into the governance and management of two institutions in the further education sector.

Under section 81 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, if it appears to my right hon. Friend that the financial affairs of any institution within the higher education sector have been mismanaged, he may, after consulting the Higher Education Funding Council and the institution, make directions to the council about the provision of financial support in respect of the activities carried out by the institution. No such direction to the council has been made in respect of any higher education institution.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *805*, on new contracts for staff of colleges of further education, what authority the Further Education Funding Council has to bring pressure or offer inducements to colleges to move existing staff on to new contracts; and how it proposes to secure uniformity of conditions in colleges.

Mr. Boswell: The FEFC has asked each college to sign a declaration that contracts for new staff satisfy the two conditions that I set out in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 16 February, *Official Report*, column *842*. It is for each college to decide what form of contract it wishes to introduce for new staff and whether it can then sign the declaration.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what instructions or advice his Department offers to firms auditing the accounts of colleges of further and higher education for reporting on staff privileges, membership of private health insurance paid for by the colleges or for the detection of fraud, nepotism or sweetheart contracts by governors and principals.

Mr. Boswell: Colleges of further education are required by their instruments of government to appoint auditors and to carry out audit work in accordance with the requirements of the Further Education Funding Council. The Further Education Funding Council Unit, the precursor of the Further Education Funding Council, issued in July 1992 advice on external audit, including guidance on the appointment of auditors, scope of audit and reporting arrangements. The Comptroller and Auditor General and the Council both have powers to inspect colleges' accounts where they consider this appropriate.

Colleges of higher education are subject to the auditing requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The Council's audit code of practice was issued in July 1993. Higher education institutions funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England are required, from 1994-95, to disclose the actual total emoluments of the vice-chancellor, director or principal, including benefits in kind valued as cash.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *503*, whether his Department has asked any colleges for explanations about the forms of contract they have agreed with staff, or approved any contract offered by any college;

(2) what explanation he has sought from Manchester college of arts and technology about its new contract terms for staff.

Mr. Boswell: The Department has asked Manchester college of arts and technology to explain how its agreement with the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education allows it to sign the declaration to the FEFC that its new contract of employment for lecturing staff is significantly different from its current contract of employment. It has not sought an explanation from any other college.

Universities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to include the bonds proposed to be issued on behalf of universities in the public sector borrowing requirements; and what factors he intends to take into account to assess whether such inclusion was required.

Mr. Boswell: Universities are classified as private institutions and loans they raise from the private finance sector do not add to the PSBR. The definition of the public sector is essentially a matter for the Central Statistical Office.

Special Educational Needs

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the effect of his Department's funding for special educational needs grants for education support and training on other education budgets.

Mr. Forth: The GEST programme prioritises less than 2 per cent. of overall LEA expenditure. In 1994-95, there are five SEN grants which total £23·7 million of the overall budget for GEST of £270·6 million.

It is for LEAs themselves to decide how much of their overall education budget to spend respectively on special educational needs and other areas of education.

Nursery Classes

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many full-time equivalent pupils in designated nursery classes in January 1993 were born between *(a)* 1 September 1987 and 31 December 1987, *(b)* 1 January 1988 and 31 March 1988 and *(c)* 1 April 1988 and 31 August 1988 in each local education authority;

(2) how many full-time equivalent pupils in primary schools, though not in designated nursery classes, in January 1993 were born between *(a)* 1 September 1987 and 31 December 1987, *(b)* 1 January 1988 and 31 March 1988 and *(c)* 1 April 1988 and 31 August 1988 in each local education authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of pupils aged four at the beginning of the school year 1992-93 being taught in nursery and infant classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in England is shown in the table.

Full Time Equivalent[1] of pupils aged 4 in maintained primary schools in each Local Education Authority in England

January 1993

	Pupils aged 4 born between:-					
	1 September 1987-31 December 1987		*1 January 1988-31 March 1988*		*1 April 1988-31 August 1988*	
LEA	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*
Corporation of London	0·0	8·0	0·5	5·0	6·5	5·0
Camden	0·0	509·0	1·0	364·0	18·0	580·0
Greenwich	1·0	1,050·0	9·0	782·0	411·0	229·0
Hackney	0·0	871·0	1·0	560·0	449·5	229·0
Hammersmith	0·0	477·0	2·0	363·0	174·5	220·0
Islington	0·0	746·0	1·5	568·0	363·5	293·0
Kensington and Chelsea	1·0	313·5	0·0	246·5	128·5	93·0
Lambeth	0·0	951·0	12·0	736·0	326·5	254·0
Lewisham	0·0	974·0	2·5	798·5	412·0	237·0
Southwark	4·0	1,112·0	9·0	771·0	503·5	366·0
Tower Hamlets	21·0	969·0	36·0	685·0	472·0	290·0
Wandsworth	0·0	791·0	0·0	609·5	0·0	1,071·5
Westminster	4·0	469·0	4·0	332·0	161·0	153·0
Barking and Dagenham	0·5	750·0	1·0	559·0	2·0	896·0
Barnet	0·5	1,120·5	0·5	831·0	8·0	1,401·5
Bexley	0·0	890·0	0·5	808·0	173·5	206·5
Brent	57·0	960·0	42·0	732·0	73·5	1,232·0
Bromley	0·0	1,156·0	0·5	938·0	27·5	225·5
Croydon	0·0	1,287·0	0·0	1,005·5	0·5	1,788·0
Ealing	11·0	1,172·0	7·5	905·0	15·0	1,437·0
Enfield	1·0	1,081·0	0·0	871·5	1·0	1,447·5
Haringey	0·0	943·0	1·0	671·0	5·5	1,116·0
Harrow	1·0	855·0	0·5	622·0	0·5	1,015·5
Havering	0·0	967·0	1·0	745·0	2·5	747·5
Hillingdon	1·0	964·0	341·0	49·0	590·5	15·5
Hounslow	1·0	841·0	3·0	697·0	14·5	1,087·5
Kingston upon Thames	0·0	502·0	13·5	363·5	5·5	376·5
Merton	0·0	695·0	0·0	511·5	200·5	359·0
Newham	0·0	1,206·0	379·5	3·0	522·5	0·0
Redbridge	0·0	953·5	40·5	655·5	184·5	520·0
Richmond upon Thames	0·0	569·0	0·0	209·0	0·5	375·5
Sutton	0·0	702·0	186·5	34·0	308·0	15·0
Waltham Forest	1·0	981·0	13·5	785·0	445·0	192·0
Birmingham	1·0	4,907·0	5·0	3,618·0	14·5	6,263·5
Coventry	0·5	1,411·0	0·0	1,053·0	1·0	1,762·0
Dudley	0·0	1,293·0	1·5	1,060·0	460·0	246·0
Sandwell	23·0	1,404·0	16·5	1,048·0	26·0	1,732·0
Solihull	0·0	909·0	0·0	681·0	0·0	1,152·0
Walsall	0·0	1,186·0	0·0	923·0	0·5	1,533·0
Wolverhampton	0·0	1,132·0	0·0	849·0	2·0	1,463·0
Knowsley	0·0	808·0	0·0	642·0	2·0	955·0
Liverpool	1·0	2,268·0	5·0	1,691·0	8·5	2,841·0
St. Helens	0·0	775·0	0·0	604·0	2·5	1,003·5
Sefton	0·5	1,171·5	1·5	927·0	5·0	1,503·0
Wirral	0·0	1,419·0	0·0	1,169·0	0·0	1,907·0
Bolton	3·5	1,226·0	0·0	934·0	3·0	1,599·0
Bury	1·0	771·0	1·0	584·0	4·0	1,010·5
Manchester	6·5	2,186·0	24·0	1,611·0	1,660·5	779·0
Oldham	0·0	1,070·0	0·0	825·0	1·0	1,356·5
Rochdale	1·0	1,005·0	0·0	787·5	0·0	1,303·0
Salford	10·0	968·0	14·0	785·0	24·0	1,377·0
Stockport	8·0	1,268·0	9·5	927·0	20·5	1,529·0
Tameside	0·0	1041·0	0·0	817·0	2·0	1,337·0
Trafford	0·0	929·0	0·5	666·0	20·0	1,141·0
Wigan	0·0	1,406·0	0·0	1,028·5	0·0	1,673·5
Barnsley	0·5	983·0	0·5	773·0	399·0	293·0
Doncaster	0·0	1,325·0	0·0	1,023·0	0·0	1,723·0
Rotherham	0·0	1,098·0	0·5	966·0	542·5	195·0
Sheffield	1·0	2,135·0	11·5	1,712·5	759·0	660·5
Bradford	0·0	2,392·0	3·0	1,895·0	524·0	1,715·5
Calderdale	0·0	929·0	0·0	751·0	0·0	1,139·0
Kirklees	0·0	1,782·0	13·0	1,304·0	486·0	1,027·0
Leeds	1·0	3,056·0	1·5	2,422·0	1,049·5	1,152·0
Wakefield	1·0	1,414·0	2·0	1,092·0	462·0	718·5
Gateshead	0·0	820·0	0·0	585·0	0·0	1,058·0

LEA	Pupils aged 4 born between:- 1 September 1987-31 December 1987 Nursery classes	1 September 1987-31 December 1987 Infant classes	1 January 1988-31 March 1988 Nursery classes	1 January 1988-31 March 1988 Infant classes	1 April 1988-31 August 1988 Nursery classes	1 April 1988-31 August 1988 Infant classes
Newcastle upon Tyne	1·0	1,089·0	1·0	810·0	1·0	1,375·0
North Tyneside	0·0	828·0	0·0	581·5	0·5	1,063·0
South Tyneside	0·0	727·0	1·0	534·0	0·0	849·0
Sunderland	0·0	1,321·0	0·0	1,050·0	0·0	1,685·0
Isles of Scilly	0·0	10·5	0·0	4·0	0·0	9·5
Avon	3·0	3,763·5	1·5	2,877·5	4·5	5,017·5
Bedfordshire	42·5	2,480·5	416·0	999·0	695·0	936·0
Berkshire	6·5	3,102·0	386·5	510·5	725·5	107·0
Buckinghamshire	2·0	2,666·0	4·0	1,395·5	387·5	541·0
Cambridgeshire	0·0	2,840·0	0·0	2,251·5	2·0	3,631·5
Cheshire	0·0	4,159·0	0·0	3,196·5	6·5	5,138·0
Cleveland	12·0	2,702·0	7·0	2,085·0	22·5	3,478·0
Cornwall	1·0	1,956·0	2·0	1,450·5	117·5	1,322·0
Cumbria	0·0	1,947·5	0·0	1,501·0	0·0	2,478·5
Derbyshire	2·5	3,841·5	15·5	3,090·5	1,129·0	1,688·0
Devon	0·0	3,854·0	4·5	3,030·5	434·5	1,249·5
Dorset	0·0	2,260·5	0·0	1,463·0	7·5	1,507·5
Durham	1·0	2,554·5	3·0	1,941·0	93·0	2,808·5
East Sussex	1·0	2,556·0	1·0	2,083·5	58·0	1,705·5
Essex	0·5	6,178·0	18·0	5,067·0	454·5	1,542·5
Gloucestershire	0·0	2,121·5	0·0	1,705·5	0·0	2,720·0
Hampshire	0·0	6,538·0	0·5	5,356·0	236·0	1,444·5
Hereford and Worcester	0·0	2,676·5	0·0	2,081·0	363·5	444·0
Hertfordshire	0·0	4,066·5	29·5	3,362·0	1,139·0	1,377·0
Humberside	0·0	4,068·0	7·0	3,081·0	1,285·5	2,347·5
Isle of Wight	0·0	474·0	0·5	357·0	0·0	598·0
Kent	0·5	6,256·0	1·0	4,594·5	46·0	6,649·0
Lancashire	0·0	6,245·0	0·5	4,835·0	1·5	7,884·0
Leicestershire	21·0	3,923·5	389·5	2,432·0	1,233·0	1,463·0
Lincolnshire	0·0	2,271·0	0·0	1,786·5	31·0	3,126·5
Norfolk	0·0	2,776·5	1·5	2,134·0	18·5	2,460·5
North Yorkshire	11·0	2,694·0	20·0	2,146·0	285·0	2,787·0
Northamptonshire	1·0	2,615·0	4·0	2,015·5	4·5	3,435·5
Northumberland	0·0	1,227·0	1·5	959·0	15·0	1,566·5
Nottinghamshire	3·0	4,438·0	687·5	1,620·5	1,831·0	364·5
Oxfordshire	8·0	2,235·0	176·0	559·5	284·0	169·0
Shropshire	0·0	1,677·0	2·0	1,303·0	313·5	605·0
Somerset	0·0	1,807·5	0·0	1,423·5	5·5	2,414·0
Staffordshire	2·0	4,404·0	0·0	3,576·0	65·5	5,594·0
Suffolk	16·0	2,546·5	10·5	2,010·5	680·5	615·5
Surrey	1·0	3,503·5	2·5	2,749·0	421·5	1,087·5
Warwickshire	0·0	1,972·0	0·0	1,536·0	3·0	2,541·0
West Sussex	0·0	2,639·0	1·0	2,031·0	42·5	832·5
Wiltshire	0·0	2,447·0	0·0	1,954·5	96·0	1,311·0
Total	301·0	200,781·5	3,417·0	146,100·0	25,027·0	155,592·0

[1] Part-time pupil=0·5.

Obscene Publications Branch

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidance his Department has issued to head teachers or governors on computer pornography in schools; how his future plans for tackling it have been affected by the possible closure of the obscene publications branch at Scotland Yard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The National Council for Educational Technology is developing guidance for parents and schools on access to computers. This will include advice on computer pornography and will be available later this year. The review of the obscene publications branch is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, but I understand that there are no plans to reduce police effort in this area.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consultation there has been with teachers' unions on the future of the obscene publications branch at Scotland Yard.

Mr. Forth: None.

Professor Tim Brighouse

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much public money has been paid, or will be paid, to cover costs incurred by him as a result of Professor Tim Brighouse's successful High Court action against him.

Mr. Patten: None.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list each chairman of the Student Loans Company since its inception, the date of their appointment and who made it, the salary they received and the companies of which they were directors at the time they were also chairman of the Student Loans Company.

Mr. Boswell: The shareholders have appointed three chairmen to the Student Loans Company: Mr. John

Vereker was appointed, unpaid, on 21 December 1989 and was also a director of the Institute of Manpower Studies; Mr. Malcolm Hurlston was appointed on 6 September 1991 at a salary of £12,000 and was a director of Registry Trust Ltd. and ESOP Centre Ltd. and Mr. Kenneth Young was appointed on 28 July 1992 at a salary of £12,000 and has served as deputy chairman of the Post Office, chairman of Post Office Counters Ltd., Girobank plc and Subscription Services Ltd. and is a non-executive director of FBG Pensions Ltd. and FBG Pensions Investments Ltd.

National Youth Agency

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the future of the National Youth Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: A policy review of the National Youth Agency is under way. Contributions to an assessment of the general effectiveness of the agency have been invited from interested bodies. My right hon. Friend plans to announce the outcome of the review in the autumn. Meanwhile, I will be placing in the Library today a copy of the letter of consultation to interested bodies which includes details of the terms of reference of the policy review.

Educational Achievement

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will conduct research into the levels of educational achievement attained by different ethnic groups.

Mr. Robin Squire: Research evidence is already available on the levels of educational achievement attained by different ethnic groups. The reasons why some groups achieve better than others were examined in detail by the former Swann committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups. Lord Swann concluded that there would be little to be gained in studying the causes further and that the focus should now be on efforts to counter underachievement. The Government have been doing this, through a variety of measures to raise the educational achievement of all pupils, whatever their ethnic background.

Special Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of statutory age pupils attended a special school in each local education authority; and what was the national average, for the latest year for which information is available.

Mr. Forth: The percentage of pupils aged five to 15 attending maintained special schools in England in January 1993 was 1·31 per cent.

Information on attendance at maintained special schools in each local authority in England is given in the table.

Percentage of pupils of compulsory school age attending maintained special schools each Local Education Authority in England January 1993

Local education authority	*Percentage of pupils attending special schools*
Corporation of London	0·00
Camden	1·76
Greenwich	2·11
Hackney	2·75
Hammersmith	2·55
Islington	1·60
Kensington and Chelsea	0·78
Lambeth	3·21
Lewisham	1·68
Southwark	1·59
Tower Hamlets	1·72
Wandsworth	3·32
Westminster	1·14
Barking	0·69
Barnet	0·77
Bexley	0·89
Brent	1·14
Bromley	0·99
Croydon	1·26
Ealing	1·32
Enfield	1·06
Haringey	1·30
Harrow	0·79
Havering	0·61
Hillingdon	1·24
Hounslow	1·39
Kingston upon Thames	1·45
Merton	1·22
Newham	0·74
Redbridge	1·30
Richmond upon Thames	0·85
Sutton	1·13
Waltham Forest	2·37
Birmingham	1·72
Coventry	1·83
Dudley	1·36
Sandwell	1·87
Solihull	0·90
Walsall	1·21
Wolverhampton	1·36
Knowsley	2·45
Liverpool	2·16
St. Helens	1·73
Sefton	0·96
Wirral	1·57
Bolton	1·14
Bury	1·18
Manchester	2·33
Oldham	1·30
Rochdale	1·55
Salford	1·28
Stockport	0·99
Tameside	1·27
Trafford	1·28
Wigan	1·85
Barnsley	0·43
Doncaster	1·50
Rotherham	1·56
Sheffield	1·27
Bradford	0·89
Calderdale	0·48
Kirklees	1·14
Leeds	0·91
Wakefield	1·29
Gateshead	1·28
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1·96
North Tyneside	1·49
South Tyneside	1·40
Sunderland	1·39
Isles of Scilly	0·00
Avon	1·63
Bedfordshire	1·36
Berkshire	1·59
Buckinghamshire	1·66
Cambridgeshire	1·00
Cheshire	0·92
Cleveland	1·46
Cornwall	0·42
Cumbria	0·34

Local education authority	Percentage of pupils attending special schools
Derbyshire	0·89
Devon	1·33
Dorset	1·37
Durham	1·24
East Sussex	1·65
Essex	1·18
Gloucestershire	1·74
Hampshire	1·63
Hereford and Worcester	1·21
Hertfordshire	1·40
Humberside	0·89
Isle of Wight	1·23
Kent	1·43
Lancashire	1·56
Leicestershire	0·80
Lincolnshire	1·35
Norfolk	0·89
North Yorkshire	1·04
Northamptonshire	1·18
Northumberland	1·12
Nottinghamshire	1·07
Oxfordshire	1·06
Shropshire	0·85
Somerset	1·02
Staffordshire	1·36
Suffolk	0·84
Surrey	1·58
Warwickshire	1·65
West Sussex	1·37
Wiltshire	0·99
England	1·31

ENVIRONMENT

Habitats Directive

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be laying the draft regulations for the implementation of the EC habitats directive before the House.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the Government's detailed response to the EU habitats directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Government are firmly committed to the transportation of the directive into United Kingdom law. I expect to lay draft regulations under the affirmative procedure before the House shortly.

Council House Sales

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of local authority capital receipts from council house sales set aside as provision to meet credit liabilities.

Mr. Baldry: Returns from local authorities indicate that the total amounts set aside as provision to meet credit liabilities at 31 March 1993 was £6·2 billion. No figures are available within this total for the amounts set aside from capital receipts arising from the sale of council houses.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been *(a)* the total number of council house sales and *(b)* the number as a percentage of stocks in each district council area for the period since 1980.

Sir George Young: A table showing the available information on the total number of council dwelling sales in each English local authority for every financial year since 1979-80 and a cumulative total to December 1993 is in the Library. The table also gives data on the cumulative total of sales expressed as a percentage of the estimated stock at 1 April 1979.

Ponds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider carrying out a survey into the desirability of pond preservation orders, similar to tree preservation orders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Results from a special analysis of the countryside survey 1990 on ponds are expected shortly. Environmental schemes, such as countryside stewardship, protect environmental features including ponds and encourage their creation. Against this background I have no plans to introduce specific statutory protection for ponds.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the relationship between the new index of local conditions and the Z score of deprivation as used by his Department to distribute resources to local government;

(2) what plans he has to change the resource distribution methodologies to reflect the deprivation of Birmingham as measured by the index of local conditions.

Mr. Baldry: The index of local conditions and its predecessor based on Z scores are not used to determine resource distribution. The index is one of the factors which Government offices of the regions may take into account in assessing bids for funding through the single regeneration budget. There are no plans to include the index of local conditions in the standard spending assessment system used to distribute revenue support grant. As well as many other indicators reflecting higher spending need, the SSA system already includes economic and social indices.

Local Government Review

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the cost of the local government review to local government.

Mr. Baldry: We have no estimates for the expenditure incurred by local authorities on the local government review.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate Ordnance Survey has made of the costs of revising maps to show new local authority boundaries resulting from the current local government review.

Mr. Baldry: The provisional estimate is for a cost between £1·5 million and £3·5 million. Ordnance Survey will make a more precise estimate when results of the local government review are known.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the costs to date and estimated future costs of *(a)* the Local Government Commission, *(b)* the Staff Commission and *(c)* the Audit Commission in relation to the local government review.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission incurred expenditure of £2·056 million in 1992-93 and received grant in aid of £5·124 million in 1993-94. We are making available £8·300 million to fund the Commission's activities in 1994-95, and have announced provision of £2·500 million and £1·500 million for the years 1995-96 and 1996-97.

The Local Government Staff Commission (England) incurred expenditure of £270,692 in 1993-94. We are making available £363,000 to the staff commission in 1994-95, and intend to make available £374,000 in 1995-96, and £386,000 in both 1996-97 and 1997-98.

Where the Local Government Commission invited the Audit Commission's views on proposals for reorganisation, its costs were reimbursed. The Audit Commission has also produced a consultation paper on local government reorganisation—"Time for Change"—at a cost of £46,603. Future work and associated costs will be determined by the response to that consultation paper.

River Water Quality

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received regarding river water pollution from mining or former mining works in each region in England during the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: In the past year, some 60 representations have been received expressing concern specifically about potential or actual mine water pollution in the National Rivers Authority's Northumbria and Yorkshire region; eight in the Severn-Trent region, two in the North West region and five in the South Western region. In addition there have been some 20 general representations.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes have taken place in each of the last 10 years in river water quality in the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The relevant five-year river quality surveys for 1985 and 1990 are available in the House Library. The most recent report on river quality by the National Rivers Authority, published in May 1994, shows a significant improvement in the north-west, with the proportion of good quality rivers increasing from 42 per cent. to 53 per cent. between 1990 and 1992, and the proportion of poor or bad quality rivers declining from 27 per cent. to 19 per cent.

Road Crossing Facilities

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make additional financial resources available for the provision of road crossing facilities for *(a)* the visually disabled and *(b)* other disabled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Resources for revenue spending by local authorities on the provision of road crossing facilities for the disabled are included within their standard spending assessment for highway maintenance. Provisional decisions on the highway maintenance standard spending assessment for 1995-96 will be announced shortly after the Budget as part of the proposed local authority finance settlement.

Local authorities may also include the provision of such facilities within their annual transport policy programmes which receive funding from the Department of Transport.

The provision of road crossing facilities for the disabled is at the discretion of individual local authorities, which are best placed to decide on the level of provision taking account of local circumstances and their own spending priorities.

Wildlife

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *879-80*, how many more nature conservation orders he has granted or refused under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England; how many are still in force; and if he will make a statement;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *576*, how many further prosecutions have been taken under sections 28 or 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Since 31 December 1993, one new nature conservation order has been made and three orders have been revoked. There are now 16 orders in force.

There have been no further prosecutions under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and one under section 29.

Departmental Housing

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will publish the report of the empty homes task group.

Sir George Young: We intend to publish shortly the report of the task force on Government Departments' empty houses, along with a Government response to its recommendations.

Medway Special Protection Area

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons Her Majesty's Government excluded Lappel bank from the Medway special protection area.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend's reasons for excluding Lappel bank from the Medway special protection area are set out in my officials' letter of 10 December 1993 to the chief executive, English Nature, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Water Meters

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has agreed that the Director General of Water Services should be able to make it a condition that water companies intending to expand their system should be required to extend also the installation of meters.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Director General of Water Services, the NRA and water companies. When expanding their systems, water companies are expected to assess the relative merits of demand management measures, such as metering or leakage control as compared with resource development. I understand that all but five water companies have a policy of metering water supplies for new connections.

Coal Extraction

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies he proposes to include in revised planning guidance for coal extraction in the light of responses to the public consultation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies he proposes to include in revised planning guidance for coal extraction in the light of responses to public consultation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The draft guidance that we published in December last year provides a stronger environmental framework than the guidance published in 1988. The Government believe that the planning framework for coal extraction should be based on the same general principles as for other mineral extraction. To avoid any misunderstanding, we have decided to delete the statement in the draft guidance that "it would be against the national interest to refuse permission for coal extraction". It is clear from the responses to consultation that the reference to "the national interest" in paragraph 15 of the draft guidance has been wrongly interpreted as giving an extra presumption in favour of coal mining development.

The Government wish to see the development of the largest economically viable coal industry for the longer term within its broad objectives of encouraging competition, promoting economic growth and assisting the creation and maintenance of employment. This must, of course, be consistent with land use planning criteria, and the best way of striking the balance between the economic importance of this indigenous energy resource and the protection of the environment is through the careful consideration of individual applications within the framework of the development plan-led system.

The Government's policy is that, where the development can be carried out in an environmentally acceptable way and consistent with the principles of sustainable development, there is no case, in land use planning terms, for placing more restrictions on coal extraction and colliery spoil disposal than are necessary to ensure full and proper protection of the environment.

We hope to publish final guidance before the summer recess to provide a planning framework which will ensure that the industry can develop the mineral resource in a way that has proper regard to local concerns and is fully compatible with economic growth, the protection of the environment and the principles of sustainable development. I am confident that with careful planning and a sensitive approach to local concerns the industry will be able to come forward with proposals that contribute to economic growth and which provide an environmentally sound foundation for the future.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if education projects with particular reference to the teaching of English to children of New Commonwealth origin are eligible as bids under the single regeneration budget; for how many such bids he has made provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The single regeneration budget encourages local partnerships to come forward with bids that reflect the needs of their areas and which meet the SRB objectives. These objectives embrace proposals which "promote initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities" and which "enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people, particularly the young and those at a disadvantage, and promote equality of opportunity". It is for local partnerships to decide what their local priorities are and to say how these fit within the strategic approach to regeneration which the SRB bidding guidance requires.

On present estimates some £100 million will be available nationally in 1995-96 to support new local bids.

DEFENCE

Al Yamamah Agreements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library tables showing the value of orders placed with British industry each year under *(a)* the Al Yamamah I intergovernmental agreement and *(b)* Al Yamamah II intergovernmental agreement valued in cash in US dollars and sterling with the exchange rate used for translation; and if he will estimate the value of sub-contracts on such orders placed outside Britain.

Mr. Aitken: No. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on detailed matters concerning individual defence export sales.

Ballistic Missile Defence

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the terms of the pre-feasibility study contract on ballistic missile def nce; how many bids he has received; from whom; and when he expects to announce the award of the contract.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom ballistic missile defence pre-feasibility study is the subject of a competitive tendering exercise. Tenders were received on 23 June 1994 from two consortia led by British Aerospace plc and Logica UK Ltd. The two tenders are being assessed against the invitation to tender. It is intended that the contract award will be announced in the autumn.

Search and Rescue Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what comparison he has made of the cost of basing search and rescue at RAF Brawdy and RAF Chivenor following the decision to mothball Chivenor and base 14 Signals Regiment at Brawdy.

Mr. Hanley: All factors, particularly the operational case but also the financial arguments, were taken into account in reaching our decision to transfer the SAR flight from RAF Brawdy to RAF Chivenor. I have no plans to conduct any further financial appraisal of this matter following my recent decision to base 14 Signals Regiment at Brawdy; my Department is currently considering alternative defence uses for RAF Chivenor.

Historic Buildings

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements have been made for independent expert advice to be given to the Ministry of Defence on the care of historic buildings which it owns or occupies.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence takes seriously the Government's commitment to aim for the highest standards of conservation for its historic buildings. To assist in achieving that aim, my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence has appointed a historic buildings advisory group.

The terms of reference of the group are that—

> It will assist my Department to manage the historic buildings on its estate by providing a source of informed advice on the care and maintenance of buildings, adaptation for new uses and disposal.
>
> It will offer expert advice on idividual buildings or groups of buildings, and their setting, and on any associated archaeological aspects as appropriate. Members of the group will provide a link to outside experts and specialists as necessary.
>
> It will provide advice on the development of my Department's general policy and strategy with a view to establishing priorities in allocating limited resources, and to devising disposal strategies for large or difficult sites. It will thus contribute to the effective management within the available resources of the Department's historic estate, in line with the Government's aim to achieve the highest standards of conservation.

My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will chair this group whenever possible; otherwise the vice-chairman, Sir William Whitfield, CBE, will lead. Other outside members of the group are

Mr. Alan Baxter
Mr. Stuart Lipton
Mr. Ian McIvor
Mr. Les Sparks

In addition, Mr. John Ledlie, a deputy under-secretary in my Department, is a member of the group.

Army Technical Branches

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for the organisation of the Army's technical branches and authorities.

Mr. Hanley: A review has been completed into the organisation and grouping of the Army's technical branches and authorities. The review reported its initial findings in August 1992.

One of the recommendations of the review was that the spares divisions located at Chilwell and Donnington should be amalgamated into one division operating from a single site, with ensuing economies of scale. This recommendation has now been subjected to operational and financial appraisals. The most cost-effective solution which has emerged is that the two provisioning and procurement divisions, the vehicle spares division Chilwell and technical equipments division Donnington, should be collocated within a rented building in Telford, near Donnington, achieving savings of some £6,000,000 per annum. I have decided to accept this recommendation as the basis for consultation with the trades unions and other interested parties. Final decisions will only be taken in the light of representations made.

I am placing a copy of the consultation document in the Library of the House.

Small Arms Ammunition

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on future orders for small arms ammunition.

Mr. Aitken: A long-term contract was won by Royal Ordnance plc last October for the supply of various types of ammunition, including small arms ammunition, during the period 1993-94 to 1997-98. The contract included an option to extend all or part of the contract for a further two years. We have now reached an agreement with Royal Ordnance to extend the small arms element of the contract to cover the years 1998 to 1999 and 1999 to 2000. This increases the value of the contract to Royal Ordnance by some £40 million and should help maintain jobs at Royal Ordnance's Radway Green factory which employs nearly 600 people.

Operation Granby

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific assessments have been made by his Department, the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, or by the United States Defence Department with his knowledge, of the possibility that some of the Iraqi targets bombed during Operation Granby released chemical warfare agents into the environment that may have contaminated British service men and women.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, CBDE, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Llew Smith, dated 24 June 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what specific assessments have been made by his Department, the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, or by the United States Defense Department with his knowledge, of the possibility that some of the Iraqi targets bombed during Operation GRANBY released chemical warfare agents into the environment that may have contaminated British servicemen and women has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. During Operation GRANBY, the potential hazard to Service personnel resulting from the bombing of Iraqi targets at which chemical weapons were stored was recognised by the Ministry of Defence. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment made an assessment of the potential downwind hazard distances based on various assumptions for the quantity of agent that might be released as a result of a bombing attack and for the associated meteorological conditions.

3. The result of the assessment indicated that even assuming simultaneous release of the majority of agent from several bunkers under meteorological conditions which favoured the downwind travel of the agent cloud and ignoring the fact that chemical agents are organic materials which are destroyed by combustion, the maximum distance at which there would be any hazard was of the order of a few tens of kilometres. In practice, simultaneous release is unlikely to occur, agent will be destroyed by combustion and meteorological conditions will be less favourable resulting in a significantly reduced downwind hazard distance.

4. The conclusion was that there was no evidence that British Servicemen and women would be exposed to chemical warfare agent as a result of bombing attacks. Our appreciation is that the US Department of Defense carried out similar studies and reached similar conclusions.

SCOTLAND

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the amount charged to council tax payers for water and sewerage charges in each of the regional and island councils of Scotland in 1994-95.

Sir Hector Monro: Households receiving a public water supply pay council water charges levied along with their council tax. Sewerage is one of the services funded from within council tax. Details of council water charges and expenditure on sewerage are given in the leaflet recently issued to households in Scotland. A copy is in the Library.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what effect the proposed local government reorganisation will have on the amount of revenue and capital grant paid to the proposed water boards.

Sir Hector Monro: The present grant system applicable to local authorities will not apply to the new water and sewerage authorities. Their arrangements will be determined by a new financial control regime. Provision is made in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill for grants to be made to the new water and sewerage authorities under clause 83.

Wildcats

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licences have been issued for the killing or taking of wildcats in each of the past five years.

Sir Hector Monro: One licence was issued for the taking of wildcats in 1989. In 1990 and 1991 no licences were issued, but in 1992 two were issued to take the species followed by a further such licence in 1993.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by county the amount of European Union arable subsidy received for the latest year for which figures are available; and what were the figures for each of the previous four years.

Sir Hector Monro: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 14 June, *Official Report*, columns *462-63*. The arable area payments scheme was introduced in 1992 and the first payments were made in 1993. There are therefore no comparable figures for previous years.

Gaelic-medium Education

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on the future of funding arrangements for Gaelic-medium education;

(2) if he will initiate a strategy aimed at ensuring the continuation of Gaelic-medium education into secondary schools;

(3) how many responses he has received to Her Majesty's inspectors' report on Gaelic education; and if he will place a summary of the responses in the Library.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Education Department has received 123 responses to Her Majesty's inspectorate report "Provision for Gaelic Education in Scotland". These are currently being analysed and summarised, and a copy of the summary will be placed in the Library in due course.

We intend to take account of the inspectorate report and the comments which have been received on it in formulating future policy for Gaelic education, on which I will make an announcement in due course.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children are now receiving Gaelic-medium education in primary schools, by local authority areas.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The 1993 school census showed that 1,144 primary school pupils were receiving Gaelic medium cross-curricular instruction. This figure is broken down by local authority areas as follows:-

Local Authority Area	*Number of Pupils*
Highland	414
Strathclyde	398
Western Isles	309
Grampian	17
Tayside	6
Total	1,144

This figure excludes primary school pupils receiving bilingual Gaelic/English instruction or other Gaelic instruction.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to safeguard the place of Gaelic-medium education following the reorganisation of local government.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I see no risk to Gaelic education arising out of local government reorganisation, as the new authorities will have the same responsibilities as the old. The Scottish Office Education Department will issue guidance to education authorities after the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill receives Royal Assent.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Lang: A full reply could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 21 February 1994 *Official Report*, columns *51-52*, and to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 16 March 1994, *Official Report*, columns *659-60* which contain much of the information sought.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if consultation on the future of the Forestry Commission will take place on the full range of options considered by the working group;

(2) if he will make a statement on the timetable for consultation on the future of the Forestry Commission and on the method of consultation.

Sir Hector Monro: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 May 1994, *Official Report*, column 48.

Tourism

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to launch additional initiatives to promote Scotland in the tourist market as the home of golf; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The statutory agency with responsibility for the promotion of Scotland as a tourist destination is the Scottish tourist board. The board recognises that golf is an important attraction to potential visitors to Scotland and features it prominently in its promotional activities both within the United Kingdom and overseas. Promotional initiatives are an operational matter for the board and I have therefore arranged for its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Glenfeshie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what weight he has attached in his consideration of Glenfeshie to policies of planting set-aside areas with trees nearer to sawmills than the south Cairngorms.

Sir Hector Monro: Glenfeshie is a private estate, and thus tree planting on the estate is a matter for its owner.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his assessment of the value of Glenfeshie and Mar Lodge as attractions for tourism in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: As the Glenfeshie and Mar Lodge estates are privately owned, my right hon. Friend has made no specific assessment of their value to tourism. However, the principal attraction of the Cairngorms area for tourists is the high quality of its landscape and natural heritage. These attractions are well represented in the Glenfeshie and Mar Lodge estates. In recognition of the national importance of the landscape and natural heritage which they contain, significant parts of these estates have been included in the Cairngorms national nature reserve, the Cairngorms national scenic area, and the proposed Cairngorms special protection area.

Conservation Areas

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the conservation areas in Scotland which are subject to article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 directive by his Department.

Mr. Allan Stewart: A comprehensive list is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

GPs (Night Visits)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 15 June, *Official Report*, columns 605-6, what is his assessment of the reasons for the upward growth in the figures for night visits by general practitioners.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* The rising trend is likely to reflect a range of factors but the step increase in 1990-91 can probably be attributed largely to changes introduced by the 1990 GP contract to the basis on which GPs are remunerated for night visits, including a two-tier system of payment for night visits and a two-hour extension of the period within which visits gave rise to eligibility for a fee.

Conveyancing and Executry Services Board

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has made a decision about the future of the Conveyancing and Executry Services Board; and what consultations he undertook before reaching his conclusions.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State announced on 21 June that the suspension of the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board would continue for a further two years. After careful consideration, we had concluded that the housing market had not yet picked up sufficiently to provide worthwhile opportunities for qualified conveyancers. The decision will be reviewed in a year's time.

No formal consultation exercise was undertaken in reaching this decision. We did, however, take into account the representations we had received over the period since the board was suspended.

Public Information

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the names and addresses of those contracted to provide one-stop access to information on behalf of his Department under the taking stock exercise, *(b)* the estimated annual amount to each including expenses, *(c)* how many inquiries have been made up to and including 1 June at each office and *(d)* the pro rata cost of each inquiry; and if he will make a statement on what has been achieved by this project.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* Of the 25 public information points established since September 1993, 20 are in departmental offices around Scotland, three are in citizens advice bureaux in Dumbarton, Airdrie and Kirkcaldy, and two are in the offices of solicitors in Perth and Kirkcudbright—at June 1994. The total cost of establishing all 25 information points is approximately £27,000 covering racking, shelving, the provision of a telephone helpline, and printed material. No payments have been made to the firms in whose offices information points have been established. A record of the number of inquirers calling at the information points is not kept, and consequently it is not possible to calculate a cost per inquiry. Information points make an important contribution to the accessibility of the Scottish Office and allow members of the public to inquire, complain or make suggestions about the Department's services and policies.

Johnstone Health Clinic

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the utilisation or disposal of the former Johnstone health clinic, which was closed when Argyll and Clyde health board opened the new Johnstone health centre.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* I understand that this property is currently being considered for use as a centre for day care for adults with learning disabilities. The project sponsors—Argyll and Clyde health board, Strathclyde regional council, and Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust—expect to make a decision during the summer.

Consultants (Merit Awards)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number and total cost of merit awards currently made to consultants for each health authority in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The information is shown in the table:

Area	*A+*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*Cost per area*
Argyll and Clyde	—	—	10	22	410,282
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	4	23	311,681
Borders	—	—	—	11	112,584
Common Services Agency	1	2	4	2	222,565
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	4	13	209,332
Fife	—	1	6	18	340,973
Forth Valley	—	—	4	20	281,907
Grampian	2	12	20	54	1,279,010
Greater Glasgow	12	45	81	142	4,566,621
Highland	—	1	10	21	442,372
Lanarkshire	—	2	4	37	524,275
Lothian	11	27	50	97	2,918,595
Orkney	—	—	—	1	10,235
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—
State Hospital	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	2	9	23	46	1,088,476
Western Isles	—	—	1	2	40,935
Total numbers per award type	28	99	221	509	—
Total cost	—	—	—	—	12,759,843

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Consultants

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list for each of the last five years, the cost to public funds of consultancy work provided by *(a)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(b)* Touche Ross, *(c)* Price Waterhouse, *(d)* Ernst and Young, *(e)* CSL, *(f)* Prime, *(g)* Basis, *(h)* Theodore Goddard, *(i)* Dibb Lupton Broomhead, *(j)* Capita and *(k)* Shreeveport to her Department; and if she will list any other firms which have provided consultancy work and the costs to public funds for each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: The table gives the aggregate cost of contracts with each of the 11 named consultants for the years 1990-91 to 1993-94. Details for 1989-90 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The final item in the table gives the total cost of other consultants employed by the Department for the same years. Lists of those consultants for the years in question appear after the table. The figures are presented in this aggregated form because showing the figures for each year would reveal the cost of some individual contracts and so breach commercial confidentiality. The figures exclude contracts with MAFF agencies.

Consultant	*1990-91 to 1993-94* £
(a) KPMG Peat Marwick	509,890
(b) Touche Ross	795,057
(c) Price Waterhouse	483,641
(d) Ernst and Young	2,598,758
(e) CSL	0
(f) Prime	30,878
(g) Basis	0
(h) Theodore Goddard	10,126
(i) Dibb Lupton Broomhead	0
(j) Capita	39,207
(k) Shreeveport	254,443
Others (see lists below)	21,809,271

List of additional firms which have provided consultancy work 1990-91 to 1993-94

AC Systems Ltd.
ACT Business Systems
ACT Logsys
ACT Meisys Ltd.
Admiral Management
Agricultural Analysts
Aims Systems Ltd.
Aimtec Europe
Amba Group
Amdahl (UK) Ltd.
AMP Systems
Ampersand Systems
Amtec Consulting System
Analytical Information System
Andrew Cheshire
Anglia Business Systems
Applied Systems
Applied Information Systems
Arc International Plc
Ashbourne Biosciences
Ask Group
Aslib Consultancy

Asterisk
BIS Applied Systems
BMT Reliability Consultants Ltd.
BNSS
Brandt Computer
Bristol University
Brook Systems
Building Energy Solution
Butler Cox
Cambridge Environmental Research Consultants Ltd.
Cambridge Ergonomics
CCTA
Chisq Ltd.
Civil Service College
Clarke Whitehill
Comer Capacity
Consort Consultancy
Coopers and Lybrand
Corporate Computers
CSS Trident
Currie and Brown
D. M. Shaw and Associates
DA Consulting Systems
Data Dictionary
DEGW
Digital
DIS Industrial Consultants
Disability Matters
DPP International
DR Hoodless
Duhig Berry Ltd.
E. G. Burnett
Easams Ltd.
Edinburgh University
Electronic Facilities Design
EM Consultants
Energy Auditing Agency Ltd.
EOSYS Ltd.
Exclusive Software
Ferriby Marine
FI Group Plc
Fletcher King
Forvous Computer
Forward Catering Consultancy
Foxware
Gateway
George T. Dunn Partnership
Good Technology
Grafton Database
Halcrow and Partners
Harrowell
Harwell Computer
Hayes-Davies PA
Hoskyns Group Plc
Hunterskill
IBM (UK) Ltd.
ICS (Sales) Ltd.
Inference Europe
Infologistix
Ingres
Insight Consulting
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
International Software
Intersect
ISM Consultants
Johnstone and Wright Consultants
Keith Butterfield Associates
Kermon
Korda and Co. Ltd.
L. G. Mouchel and Partners
LAB Systems
Lawrence Hewitt Partnership
LBMS
Lloyd Davies Associates
Logica
Manpower Plc
Mansell Associates
Maynes Associates
McNeel Robertson
Megaware Consultants
Metron
Midsummer Computing
Mills McClure
Miro Communication Ltd.
MJN Facilities Management
MMT Computing
Mott Macdonald
Mouncey and Partners
MSB International
MSG
National Remote Sensing Centre
Nifes Consulting Group
Office Angels
Ofice
Opal
Oracle Corporation
P. E. International Plc.
PA Consulting Group
Pactum
Pentana Ltd.
Personnel Health and Safety Ltd.
Peter Goodall
Posford Duvivier
PQ 1546
PSA Monitoring and Targeting Service
Quanta Learning Systems
R T Grundy Associates
Reed Personnel
Ricardo Technical Co.
Risks and Policy Analysis
Robertson Gould
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Santa Cruz
Sapphire International
SEC Technograph
Secure Information
Siemens Nixdorf
Sema Group Systems Ltd.
Sequelogic
Sequent Computer Systems
Sherwood Computer Systems
Sir Ronald McIntosh
Softbridge
Softlab Ltd.
South West Health Authority
Span Group
Spicer and Oppenheim
SRU Ltd.
Stoy Hayward
T M Energy Consultants
Tech Op Ltd.
Timberlake Clark
Triad Special Systems Ltd.
University of Hull
University of Reading
Vauntberry
Worthy Associates
Wye College
YACC
Zergo

Arable Subsidy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list by county the amount of European Union arable subsidy received for the latest year for which figures are available; and what were the figures *(a)* 12 months, *(b)* 24 months, *(c)* 36 months and *(d)* 48 months ago.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend on 20 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *34*. The arable area payments scheme was introduced in 1992 and the first payments were made in 1993. There are therefore no comparable figures for previous years.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will set out her reasons for not renewing this year the invitation to the Transport and General Workers Union to nominate representatives to the consultative panel on badgers and bovine tuberculosis.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Transport and General Workers Union was not invited to re-nominate a representative to the consultative panel on badgers and bovine tuberculosis this year because, following a review of membership, I decided that only those organisations with a clear and direct concern in the problem needed to be represented.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which organisations are currently invited to nominate representatives to the consultative panel of badgers and bovine tuberculosis; and which organisations were invited to nominate representatives to the panel in the previous round of nominations.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The organisations currently invited to nominate representatives to the consultative panel on badgers and bovine tuberculosis are:

British Veterinary Association
Country Landowners Association
Fauna and Flora Preservation Society
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Mammal Society
National Cattle Breeders Association
National Farmers' Union
National Federation of Badger Groups
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Royal Society For Nature Conservation
Tenant Farmers' Association
Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
Womens' Farming Union

In addition, there is an independent chairman and three independent members.

The organisation invited to nominate representatives to the panel in the previous round of nominations were:

British Veterinary Association
Country Landowners Association
Fauna and Flora Preservation Society
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Mammal Society
National Farmers' Union
National Federation of Badger Groups
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Royal Society For Nature Conservation
Transport and General Workers' Union
Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

In addition there was an independent chairman and four independent members.

Nutrition

Ms Corston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the mean consumption of the nutrient intakes of *(a)* energy, *(b)* fat *(c)* total sugars, *(d)* calcium, *(e)* iron, *(f)* carotene, *(g)* vitamins A, C, D and E, *(h)* potassium, *(i)* magnesium and *(j)* iron for (i) men and (ii) women aged 16 to 64 years in (1) social classes I and II (combined) and (2) social classes IV and V (combined); and what these figures are as a percentage of *(x)* the mean for the population for the population as a whole, *(y)* the reference nutrition Intake and *(z)* the lower reference nutrient Intake, in accordance with figures 5.2, 5.4, 5.14, 5.20, 5.22, 5.24, 5.26, 5.28 and 5.30 of the 1994 Report of the 1986-87 dietary and nutritional survey of British adults.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given in the table.

Males

[1] *I and II*

Nutrient	*Mean intake per day*	*Percentage of total population intake*	*Intake as percentage of RNI*	*Intake as percentage of LRNI*
Energy (kcals)	2,470·0	101	[2]98	n/a
Fat (g)	103·6	101	n/a	n/a
Total sugars (g)	120·6	105	n/a	n/a
Calcium (mg)	1,006·0	107	144	252
Iron (mg)	15·0	107	172	313
Carotene (µg)	2,731·0	113	n/a	n/a
Vitamin A (µg) (retinol equivalent).	1,735·0	103	248	578
Vitamin C (mg)	96·8	130	242	968
Vitamin D (µg)	4·2	111	n/a	n/a
Vitamin E (mg)	12·4	106	n/a	n/a
Potassium (mg)	3,363·0	106	96	168
Magnesium (mg)	342·0	106	114	180

[1] Social Class
[2] estimated average requirement
n/a not applicable

Males

[1] *IV and V*

Nutrient	*Mean intake per day*	*Percentage of total population intake*	*Intake as percentage of RNI*	*Intake as percentage of LRNI*
Energy (kcals)	2,410·0	98	[2]95	n/a
Fat (g)	100·1	98	n/a	n/a
Total sugars (g)	111·1	97	n/a	n/a
Calcium (mg)	868·0	92	124	217
Iron (mg)	12·8	91	147	267
Carotene (µg)	2,040·0	85	n/a	n/a
Vitamin A (µg) (retinol equivalent).	1,557·0	93	222	519

	[1]IV and V			
	Mean intake per day	*Percentage of total population intake*	*Intake as percentage of RNI*	*Intake as percentage of LRNI*
Vitamin C (mg)	53·8	72	135	538
Vitamin D (µg)	3·5	93	n/a	n/a
Vitamin E (mg)	12·7	109	n/a	n/a
Potassium (mg)	2,987·0	94	85	149
Magnesium (mg)	299·0	93	100	157

[1] Social Class
[2] estimated average requirement
n/a not applicable

Females

	[1]I and II			
	Mean intake per day	*Percentage of total population intake*	*Intake as percentage of RNI*	*Intake as percentage of LRNI*
Nutrient				
Energy (kcals)	1,740·0	104	[2]90	n/a
Fat (g)	75·8	103	n/a	n/a
Total sugars (g)	91·2	106	n/a	n/a
Calcium (mg)	790·0	108	113	198
Iron (mg)	12·9	105	99	179
Carotene (µg)	2,533·0	119	n/a	n/a
Vitamin A (µg) (retinol equivalent).	1,722·0	116	287	689
Vitamin C (mg)	96·2	132	241	962
Vitamin D (µg)	3·3	106	n/a	n/a
Vitamin E (mg)	8·7	101	n/a	n/a
Potassium (mg)	2,633·0	108	75	132
Magnesium (mg)	261·0	110	97	174

[1] Social Class
[2] estimated average requirement
n/a not applicable

Females

	[1]IV and V			
	Mean intake per day	*Percentage of total population intake*	*Intake as percentage of RNI*	*Intake as percentage of LRNI*
Nutrient				
Energy (kcals)	1,580·0	94	[2]82	n/a
Fat (g)	69·5	95	n/a	n/a
Total sugars (g)	78·0	91	n/a	n/a
Calcium (mg)	660·0	90	94	165
Iron (mg)	11·6	94	89	161
Carotene (µg)	1,613·0	76	n/a	n/a
Vitamin A (µg) (retinol equivalent).	1,217·0	82	203	487
Vitamin C (mg)	55·6	76	140	558
Vitamin D (µg)	2·9	94	n/a	n/a
Vitamin E (mg)	8·2	95	n/a	n/a
Potassium (mg)	2,219·0	91	64	111
Magnesium (mg)	208·0	87	77	139

[1] Social Class
[2] estimated average requirement
n/a not applicable

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what decisions her Department has taken in respect of TECs over the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement on her Department's involvement with TECs over the same period.

Mr. Jack: Responsibility for training and enterprise councils lies primarily with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

We attach importance to the provision of education and training for the land-based industries. MAFF takes a keen interest in ensuring that the agricultural and horticultural industries have access to the best resources available to train their work forces. To that end, MAFF has been instrumental in providing resources to the industry training organisation for agriculture and commercial horticulture, ATB-Landbase Ltd., and in helping to ensure that those organisations, such as the TECs, which guide and provide training and education of direct interest to the land-based industries, are aware of the training needs of businesses in the rural economy.

Over the last year, the Ministry has developed its contacts with several TECs on a regional basis. We have discussed how rural initiatives can be developed in partnership with businesses and training providers, and how the available resources can best be targeted to meet the training needs of the industry. Visits by Ministers to TECs

are a feature of their regional programmes. MAFF and the consortium of rural TECs are members of the national rural education and training strategy whose aim is to contribute to the development of the rural education and training infrastructure. NRETS is currently considering how existing training and education mechanisms are meeting the changing needs of the land-based industries and we look forward to its advice.

Fish Marketing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will introduce a marketing development scheme for fisheries similar to those under the Agriculture Act 1993.

Mr. Jack: The establishment of a marketing development scheme for fishery products similar to that already adopted under the Agriculture Act 1993 would not be in accordance with the EU rules on state aids in the fisheries sector. These rules are currently under review in Brussels, but it remains to be seen whether the Union will decide to change them in this respect.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column *169*, which interested parties he intends to consult regarding the future of the state veterinary service.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend intends to consult very widely, and would welcome the views of any interested person or body.

Integrated Administration and Control

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is her estimate of the proportion of eligible farm holdings, which submitted admissible integrated administration and control scheme documentation by the closing date in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jack: At the time of distributing the IACS forms we could not predict how many forms would be returned in an admissible state.

We were able to accept 155,977 applications as having been lodged with United Kingdom Agriculture Departments by the 15 May deadline; of these 81,863 were received in England, 20,329 in Wales, 25,416 in Scotland and 28,369 in Northern Ireland. An application may relate to more than one farm holding. Departments are still carrying out detailed checks to determine eligibility for payment of these applications.

WALES

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each district council area in Wales and for Wales as a whole the number of neighbourhood watch schemes in operation as at 31 December 1993.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not held in the form requested. It is collated at police force level, and the available information is as follows:

Police Force	*Total at 31 December 1993*
Dyfed-Powys Police	1,257
Gwent Police	210
North Wales Police	2,989
South Wales Police	1,292
TOTAL	5,748

Temporary Jobs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many temporary jobs were available in jobcentres in the week ended 28 May in each Welsh travel-to-work area and in total in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Information on vacancies for temporary jobs is available only on a quarterly basis. During the period 10 January 1994 to 8 April 1994 the number of vacancies for temporary jobs notified to jobcentres in Wales was 10,400. Information is not available for travel-to-work areas.

Road Safety Education

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will issue guidelines to all initial teacher training colleges recommending that they include road safety education on all PGCE and B.Ed. courses;

(2) if he will make it his policy to provide a specific allocation of financial resources for the training of teachers in road safety education.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. The Government set out the criteria which all courses of initial teacher training must meet, focusing on the subject knowledge and teaching skills new teachers require to be effective in the classroom. It is for the initial teacher training institutions to decide on the inclusion of cross-curricular elements such as road safety education in the courses they provide.

The funding made available to initial teacher training providers by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and through tuition fees is intended to reflect the costs of all aspects of the training courses and it would be inappropriate to make special provision for road safety education which is an optional element of these courses.

Separately, the Department provides funding to the British Institute of Traffic Education Research to provide the services of the Traffic Education Officer for Wales. Among other things, the duties of this officer involve advising on the handling of road user education in schools and organising seminars for student teachers.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to *(a)* place a general duty upon all schools to provide road safety education and *(b)* include child casualty reduction as a stated aim in their programmes of preventive health and safety education.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are opportunities within the framework of the national curriculum for road safety education. It is for local education authorities and schools to determine the organisation of any such education and whether it should be delivered in the context of individual national curriculum subjects or as part of a cross-curricular programme.

The Government's strategy for reducing road accidents involving children is set out in the document "Children and

Roads: A Safer Way", a copy of which is in the Library of the House and which includes a section on road safety education in schools. Road safety officers in individual authorities provide advice to schools and a range of teaching materials is available.

The Welsh Office provides funding for the services of the traffic education officer for Wales who advises on the handling of road user education in schools and organises seminars for student teachers.

Arable Subsidies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by county the amount of European Union arable subsidy received for the latest year for which figures are available; and what were the figures for each of the previous four years.

Mr. Redwood: The arable area payments scheme was introduced in 1992 and the first payments were made in 1993. There are therefore no comparable figures for previous years. Payments made since 1993 to date are as follows:

	Simplified scheme	*Main scheme*				
County	£	*Cereals* £	*Oilseeds* £	*Protein* £	*Set-aside* £	*Total* £
Clwyd	410,500	201,003	92,365	50,903	87,646	842,417
Dyfed	1,023,574	386,878	127,527	68,800	156,527	763,306
Gwent	258,122	275,784	158,478	37,083	108,494	837,961
Gwynedd	201,997	86,392	14,143	12,367	32,826	347,725
Mid Glamorgan	35,322	120,958	55,760	21,705	47,289	281,034
Powys	362,912	267,031	68,021	21,568	96,698	816,230
South Glamorgan	97,319	219,383	39,986	29,344	78,977	465,009
West Glamorgan	72,248	12,258	12,059	—	5,074	101,909
TOTAL	2,461,994	1,569,957	568,339	241,770	613,531	5,455,591

Law Students

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students studying for a law degree in the University of Wales failed to secure legal traineeship in each year since *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93 and *(c)* 1993-94.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what decisions his Department has taken in respect of training and enterprise councils over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement with TECs over the same period.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In the last 12 months my right hon. Friend has provided strategic and planning guidance to TECs; officials have negotiated contracts based on assessments of TECs' corporate and business plans and in the light of the resources available; and TEC performance has been monitored and reviewed. Throughout the year decisions were taken in the context of the TEC operating agreement and variations to business plans made as appropriate.

Student Employment (Summer Vacation)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial support he proposes to help Welsh students who fail to find employment during the summer vacation and whose parents are unable to support them; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Student support arrangements through the mandatory grant and loan make more resources available to students than through grant alone. The student loan is intended to cover the whole of the academic year including the summer vacation period. In addition, further and higher education institutions in Wales receive access funds to provide discretionary help to students in particular financial need. Access funds totalling £1·262 million for the current academic year were distributed by the Welsh funding councils to FHE institutions in Wales.

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applicants for section 4 grants were made by tourism operators in Wales in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested on the number of section 4 applications is as follows:

	Total applications
1990	210
1991	316
1992	646
1993	467

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total value of section 4 grants made to tourism operators in Wales in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested on the value of section 4 grants is as follows:

	Total value approved (£)
1990	3,838,409
1991	3,159,654
1992	4,845,233
1993	5,138,717

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many section 4 grants have been allocated to those involved in tourism services in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested on the number of section 4 grants made is as follows:

	Total approved
1990	163
1991	169
1992	488
1993	426

Pollution

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prosecutions have been brought against farmers for alleged pollution incidents in Wales in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* in the last six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally. Information on numbers of prosecutions brought by the National Rivers Authority in its Welsh region following farm water pollution incidents is contained in the authority's annual reports on "Water Pollution Incidents in England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many companies in Wales were taken to court for polluting the environment in 1993; how many of them were successfully prosecuted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution prosecuted three companies in 1993. All three prosecutions were successful.

Information about prosecutions undertaken by the National Rivers Authority is included in its annual reports, copies of which are held in the Library of the House.

Details of prosecution actions by local authorities are not held centrally.

Infertility, Gwent

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Gwent health authority has sought from his Department advice as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No.

Advanced Technology Programme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the effects of cuts in the advanced technology programme in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The effects of cuts will be minimal in Wales.

Transport Planning Policy

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will issue a document on transport planning policy guidance.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend is currently reviewing planning policy guidance note 13, "Highways Considerations in Development Control", and revised guidance will issue in due course.

Warner Report

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of Dr. Morton Warner's report for the Welsh Health Planning Forum on the future supply and demand for hospital beds and other medical facilities in Wales, with particular reference to Powys and Neath.

Mr. Redwood: Copies of the Welsh Health Planning Forum document "Health and Social Care 2010" have been placed in the Library of the House. Policy for the NHS Wales is to provide the number of beds needed to fulfil the promises of the patients charter.

NHS Trusts (Job Losses)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has received from national health service trusts about their estimates for job losses *(a)* up to the end of the current financial year and *(b)* in the next financial year.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is no requirement for NHS trusts to inform the Welsh Office of any changes in the numbers of employees.

Local Government (Wales) Bill

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the Minister of State's oral statement of 16 June, *Official Report,* column 773, giving the final date on which instructions were given to parliamentary counsel for drafting amendments to clause 44 of the Local Government (Wales) Bill *[Lords],* on what previous occasions his Department instructed parliamentary counsel in relation to the amendments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Details of such exchanges between Government Departments are not normally divulged.

Social Services

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for developing the inspection of social services in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[pursuant to his reply, 23 June 1994, Official Report, c. 274-75]:* I regret that an incomplete answer was given. A full reply is as follows:

In June 1993, I published a consultation document "Inspecting Social Services in Wales". This set out proposals for applying three key principles of the citizens charter—that inspectors should be independent of the services they inspect, that lay people should be involved in inspections, and that inspection reports should be accessible to the public.

I intend that during 1994 there should be clear and demonstrable progress, both nationally and locally, towards the wider implementation of the citizens charter principles.

The social services inspectorate for Wales has already made considerable progress. For some years its inspection reports have been available to the public. A small group is

being established to advise on the social services inspectorate's inspection work; half its membership will represent service users, carers and wider lay interests, and half will be drawn from local authorities and providers of services in the independent sector. Since February 1994, inspection teams have begun to include lay assessors; inspection reports will take full account of their views and observations.

I propose to issue shortly, for a brief consultation, draft guidance on how the same principles should be applied to the work of "arm's-length" inspection units in local authority social services departments.

The new guidance will give local authority chief executives the important role of commissioning independent annual reports on the work of inspection units. These reports will focus on whether units apply the same standards to both local authority and independent provision, and on how effectively local authorities respond when improvements are shown to be needed.

The guidance will call for a change in the composition of advisory committees for inspection units. By the end of 1994 the number of lay people unconnected with the authority should be increased so that they form a majority on advisory committees.

I intend, too, that during 1994 we will begin to see lay people involved in social services inspections, and their views reflected in inspection reports. It will not be possible to include lay people in every inspection, but there must be substantial lay involvement on a regular and continuing basis.

The consultation document restated the Government's commitment to open reporting. I have been greatly encouraged to see that most county councils in Wales are already making inspection reports publicly available. I intend that by the end of 1994 this should be normal practice for all authorities.

This requirement for open reporting will cover joint inspections by local authorities and health authorities of premises dually registered as both residential care homes and nursing homes. I believe that progress towards joint working will be further helped if both sectors are working to the same citizens charter principles. I shall be consulting health authorities, nursing home associations and others about how this can best be done.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of total budget in each Welsh district health authority and trust was spent on *(a)* managerial, *(b)* administrative and *(c)* clerical costs in each year since 1991-92.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The percentages of total expenditure by each district health authority and national health service trust in Wales accounted for by spending on managerial, administrative and clerical costs in 1991-92 and 1992-93 were as follows:

Percentage

Authority	*Managerial*	*Administrative and Clerical*
1991-92		
Clwyd	1·5	6·1
East Dyfed	1·2	6·6
Gwent	0·9	6·3
Gwynedd	0·7	6·3
Mid Glamorgan	0·3	6·0
Pembrokeshire	1·0	6·3
Powys	1·5	3·8
South Glamorgan	2·4	8·2
West Glamorgan	1·2	5·8
1992-93		
Clwyd	2·1	5·6
East Dyfed	1·3	6·7
Gwent	1·1	6·8
Gwynedd	0·5	6·9
Mid Glamorgan	0·6	3·2
Pembrokeshire	0·2	0·1
Powys	1·6	4·2
South Glamorgan	2·3	8·9
West Glamorgan	1·0	5·7
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	2·0	8·9

Sources:
Health Authorities Annual Accounts/Financial Returns
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust Annual Accounts/Financial Returns (1992-93 only).

House Burglaries

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many house burglaries were reported in Wales and for each county in Wales for the year 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The table shows the number of domestic burglaries recorded in each police force in Wales in 1993. The information is not available centrally for counties and 1994 data are not yet available.

Domestic burglaries recorded in Wales in 1993, by police force

Force	*Number*
Dyfed Powys	1,567
Gwent	3,315
North Wales	3,917
South Wales	14,478
Wales	23,277

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the response of the United Nations to Tanzania's proposed withdrawal from the peacekeeping operation in Liberia; and what reason was given by Tanzania for this withdrawal.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Tanzania has not made a definite decision to withdraw from the ECOMOG peacekeeping force in Liberia. The United Nations is in negotiation with the Tanzanians to solve problems which have arisen with logistic support for the Tanzanian battalion.

Inhumane Weapons Convention

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to strengthen mines protocol No. 11 to the 1981 inhumane weapons convention.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A review conference on the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention has been called for 1995, the main aim of which will be to consider strengthening protocol II on the use of land mines. We are already playing a full role in the preparations for that conference.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy and rationale with regard to the ratification of the 1980 inhumane weapons convention.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom has signed the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention, and we are now working actively towards ratification. We hope to achieve this soon, certainly in time for the review conference in 1995.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is seeking to extend the 1980 inhumane weapons convention to cover internal conflicts.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The application of the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention to non-international conflicts is one of the issues being considered by the expert groups preparing for the review conference on the convention in 1995. We are playing a full role in this process.

South Lebanon

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances the Israeli Government have given him about their intentions for South Lebanon and on the time scale and diplomatic procedures for the fulfilment of those intentions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received assurances from Prime Minister Rabin that Israel recognises its international border with Lebanon and has no territorial claim on Lebanese territory.

On 18 April, in a speech to the Knesset, Prime Minister Rabin proposed that, "In the first phase, the Lebanese army be deployed up to the Northern border of the security zone. For six months, it must prove its ability to maintain total calm and to disarm Hizbullah in Southern Lebanon. If this is proven and total quiet reigns on the Northern border of the security zone, we will begin peace negotiations that I hope will last three months. We will be prepared to withdraw to the International border between Lebanon and Israel on three conditions: Full peace and normalisation; appropriate security arrangements; and, of course, our commitments to the Southern Lebanese Army and the residents of Southern Lebanon, the integration of the South Lebanese Army within the Lebanese army and a guarantee to residents of Southern Lebanon that they will not be harmed."

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Israel gave undertakings to withdraw from South Lebanon before he lifted the arms embargo on Israel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Prime Minister Rabin has given my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs assurances that Israel recognises its international border with Lebanon and has no territorial claim on Lebanese territory.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's involvement with TECs.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department has in the past received help with our new entrant training programme for technical staff. A redundancy task force is now providing assistance in the design of a redundancy package; and the TECs have provided information and presentations on national vocational qualifications and Investors in People.

Bosnia

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given to funding the restoration of Bosnia-Herzegovina's historic monuments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have taken the lead in the international effort to restore Sarajevo library, and have made a substantial contribution to restocking books. We are considering together with the international community the broader general need for reconstruction once there is a lasting peace settlement.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when instructions for entitlement to free entry clearance were sent to all the relevant posts: and if he will deposit in the Library a copy of the instructions.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The payment, or waiver, of consular fees, which include fees for entry clearances, is regulated by the Consular Fees Act 1980 and the Consular Fees Orders, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Their texts are included in "Diplomatic Service Procedure", which is issued to all missions overseas.

Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the commitments the UN Security Council has made to peacekeeping operations in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994 to the latest date; what are the total estimated expenditure on each of these commitments; and what the estimated United Kingdom contribution is to each of them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following figures are taken from the UN status of contribution reports, as at 30 April 1994:

Year and Peacekeeping Operation	*Total United Nations Costs ($)*	*United Kingdom Assessment ($)*
1992		
UNEF/UNDOF (Golan Heights)	35,202,425	2,120,982
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	144,962,169	8,792,954
UNAVEM (Angola)	56,604,651	3,420,182
ONUCA (Central America)	12,120,754	724,660
UNIKOM (Iraq/Kuwait)	60,869,647	3,651,915
ONUSAL (El Salvador)	36,260,035	2,175,387
UNAMIC (Cambodia)	33,294,358	2,010,720
UNTAC (Cambodia)	801,823,206	48,813,331
UNPROFOR (Yugoslavia)	250,455,801	15,254,166
UNOSOM (Somalia)	108,441,298	6,584,483
Totals	1,540,034,344	93,548,780

Year and Peacekeeping Operation	Total United Nations Costs ($)	United Kingdom Assessment ($)
1993		
UNEF/UNDOF (Golan Heights)	34,876,514	2,197,941
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	145,743,422	9,222,081
UNAVEM (Angola)	39,455,995	2,452,303
UNIKOM (Iraq/Kuwait)	47,724,255	3,003,584
ONUSAL (El Salvador)	26,820,645	1,645,125
UNTAC (Cambodia)	633,052,039	39,817,868
UNPROFOR (Yugoslavia)	1,000,492,613	63,180,260
UNOSOM (Somalia)	487,363,740	30,982,123
UNUMOZ (Mozambique)	193,305,270	12,186,193
UNFICYP[1] (Cyprus)	8,547,112	538,081
Totals	2,617,381,605	165,225,559
1994		
UNEF/UNDOF (Golan Heights)	Nil at 30 April 1994	
As at end April 1994		
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	22,551,241	1,427,407
UNAVEM (Angola)	11,160,876	699,901
UNIKOM (Iraq/Kuwait)	Nil at 30 April 1994	
ONUSAL (El Salvador)	18,261,194	1,126,194
UNTAC (Cambodia)	100,000,000	6,372,790
UNMLTC (Cambodia)	734,462	46,145
UNPROFOR (Yugoslavia)	721,870,851	45,940,530
UNOSOM (Somalia)	581,887,289	37,037,392
ONUMOZ (Mozambique)	138,891,762	8,810,223
UNFICYP (Cyprus)	10,207,835	641,833
UNOMIG (Georgia)	2,470,084	155,453
UNMIH (Haiti)	1,509,915	95,725
UNOMIL (Liberia)	39,801,097	2,521,099
UNAMIR (Rwanda)	83,054,455	5,265,229
Totals	1,732,401,061	110,139,921

[1] UNFICYP was only brought onto United Nations assessed contribution funding on 15 June 1993. It was previously funded through voluntary contributions.

MINURSO (Western Sahara) was established in 1991. Costs for subsequent years have been met from the original resources.

Korea

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the documents submitted to the Foreign Affairs Council in Corfu on the European Union policy position on the Korean nuclear problem.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the European Council meeting in Corfu, Heads of Government expressed their deep concern at North Korea's continued failure to comply with its safeguards agreement, and their hope that exchanges currently being pursued would rapidly result in a satisfactory solution to the crisis. A copy of the presidency's conclusions has been placed in the Library of the House.

Czech Republic

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relationship with the Czech Republic; what ministerial visits have taken place to the Czech Republic in the past 12 months; and what official Czech visits have been made to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom's relations with the Czech Republic are close and cordial.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Prague on 5 to 6 May. Four other British Ministers have paid visits to the Czech Republic within the last 12 months. During the same period, President Havel, Prime Minister Klaus and eight Czech Ministers or deputy Ministers have visited the United Kingdom.

Hong Kong

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government plan to take to facilitate the extension to Hong Kong of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Mr. Goodlad: As extending the convention to Hong Kong involves assuming new international obligations in respect of Hong Kong, we will shortly be consulting the Chinese side in the joint liaison group, so that it can continue to apply to Hong Kong after 30 June 1997. In the meantime, the Hong Kong Government are preparing legislation to prohibit sex discrimination and to set up an equal opportunities commission to promote gender equality.

Japan

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Japanese counterpart following the statement by the Japanese Prime Minister to the Japanese Diet on 17 June that Japan has the capacity to make nuclear weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made no representations to, nor have we communicated with, the Japanese Prime Minister with regard to his comment of 17 June. As a non-nuclear weapon state party to the non-proliferation treaty, Japan has given a legally binding commitment not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons. In accordance with the NPT, Japan has also concluded a fullscope safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We have no reason to doubt the commitment of the Japanese Government to the principles of the treaty.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to *(a)* raise with his Russian and American counterparts and *(b)* to instruct the British ambassador to the United Nations to raise with his counterparts as representing the other depositary states for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty the statement by the Japanese Prime Minister to the Japanese Diet on 17 June that Japan has the capacity to build nuclear weapons, in regard to Japan's commitments under the NPT.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As a non-nuclear weapon state party to the non-proliferation treaty, Japan has given a legally binding commitment not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons. Japan has also concluded a fullscope safeguards agreement with the IAEA. We have no reason to doubt the commitment of the Japanese Government to the principles of the treaty.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the former Prime Minister of Sudan, Sadiq al-Mahdi, has been

detained in Sudan in recent years; on what grounds he has recently been detained; and what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan about this matter.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sadiq Al-Mahdi was detained immediately after the 1989 coup and has subsequently been regularly held for questioning. He was most recently detained on 20 June. Although he has not yet been formally charged, allegations have been made in the officially controlled press of his involvement in a plot to assassinate senior members of the regime and conduct acts of sabotage. Our chargé in Khartoum raised his detention with the Sudanese authorities on 21 June. We shall continue to monitor developments closely.

Corfu Summit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he plans to put to the European Union Heads of Government summit in Corfu on the control of nuclear proliferation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Council agreed on the adoption of a joint action on preparation for the 1995 non-proliferation treaty extension and review conference, the primary object of which would be to secure the treaty's indefinite and unconditional extension.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what difficulties are caused to British commercial interests by corruption in Kenya.

Mr. Goodlad: I am not aware of any specific difficulties caused to British commercial interests by corruption in Kenya. However, I am happy to make it clear that elimination of corruption is an important part of our good governance agenda in Kenya, as in other countries. We have made this clear to the Kenyan Government, and welcome their recent efforts to address the issue.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy stance the Western European Union has taken on the proposed French military initiative in Rwanda.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A number of WEU member states, including the United Kingdom, have indicated their readiness to assist and support the French initiative in Rwanda primarily through the provison of logistic resources, which might be co-ordinated through the WEU, and humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what approaches he has had from the French Government for military support in Rwanda; and what reply he has given.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The French approached the United Kingdom, as well as other European allies, for logistic support for the intervention in Rwanda authorised under Security Council resolution 929. In the event, we understand that the French supported their operation nationally.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of when the UN Security Council's decision to deploy 5,500 troops in Rwanda will be enacted.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Work on the deployment of additional troops authorised by Security Council resolution 918 is already under way. The UN expect that the force will begin to deploy in July.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the British Government are now taking through the United Nations to bring about an end to the genocide in Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has supported all Security Council action aimed at bringing the attacks on civilians in Rwanda to an end. We have also offered logistic support to the expanded UNAMIR operation.

The United Kingdom supported the resolution adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 25 May which appointed a special rapporteur for human rights in Rwanda. The special rapporteur is gathering information for the United Nations Secretary General on acts which may constitute breaches of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity, including acts of genocide in Rwanda.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to provide logistical support for African countries supplying peacekeeping troops to Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom offered the United Nations 50 four-wheel drive trucks for use in the United assistance mission to Rwanda.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement regarding the situation in Rwanda.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 15 June, column *615*.

Since then the United Nations Security Council has authorised a two-month humanitarian intervention by the French Government. We voted in favour and remain ready to assist with emergency aid for those displaced in Rwanda as access improves. We have urged that the UNAMIR force should deploy as quickly as possible and that the French operation should not cut across United Nations action to end the bloodshed.

Arms Sales Embargo

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries on which the United Kingdom has imposed an arms sales embargo.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We observe mandatory embargoes imposed by the United Nations on Iraq, the former republic of Yugoslavia, Somalia, Liberia, Haiti, Libya, Rwanda and UNITA in Angola. We observe the voluntary embargo imposed by the United Nations on Yemen.

We also observe embargoes imposed by the European Union on Syria, China, Burma, Zaire and Sudan.

We observe a voluntary embargo agreed by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe on Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In addition, as a matter of declared national policy we refuse to supply military equipment to Argentina and Iran.

Pakistan

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations between Her Majesty's Government and Pakistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our relations with Pakistan are excellent.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Pakistan regarding the release of all detained democratically elected members of the National Assembly, in accordance with the United Nations human rights resolution of 1966.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are not aware that any member of the Pakistan National Assembly is currently being detained.

Nigeria

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to assist and encourage the Government of Nigeria to move towards the establishment of democracy.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the written reply I gave the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 31 January at column *485*. Moves towards the establishment of democratic civilian rule would send a positive message to the European Union and other countries which have introduced measures against military rule, and to companies which do business with Nigeria. We are funding a number of practical initiatives in Nigeria in support of a democratic transition.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Affairs

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Lord President of the Council following the statement made by the Secretary of State for Wales in the Welsh Grand Committee on 8 March 1993 in Cardiff, *Official Report*, columns 1-13, which new initiatives he has proposed for the debate and scrutiny of Welsh affairs in the House.

Mr. Redwood: I have been asked to reply.

I review the need for meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee through the normal channels. The venue for these meetings is also discussed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures available for women claiming family credit while *(a)* in employment and *(b)* unemployed for (i) Burnley, (ii) Lancashire, (iii) the north-west and (iv) England.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Statistics

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average annual disposable income at *(a)* actual and *(b)* April 1994 prices of (i) pensioner households, (ii) non-pensioner households without children (iii) non-pensioner households with children and (iv) all households, in (1) the two lowest decile groups and (2) the highest decile group, applying the appropriate equivalence scale used in his Department's recent reports on households below average income for (w) 1979, (x) 1988-89, (y) 1990-91 and (z) 1991-92, before and after housing costs; and what was the mean unequivalised disposable income of these groups of households in these equivalised categories.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available. This Department does not produce statistics on the distribution of annual equivalised incomes. The households below average income series is based on incomes estimated generally over a much shorter period, which can be expected to produce different results.

Deafness

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the time limit on claims for industrial deafness.

Mr. Scott: A claim for benefit in respect of occupational deafness must be made within five years of leaving a prescribed occupation.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the differences in treatment of industrial deafness claims and war deafness claims; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The qualifying conditions and benefit rates for the two schemes are as follows:

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Industrial injuries benefits may be paid in respect of occupational deafness where the claimant:

(a) is assessed as at least 20 per cent. disabled as a result of sensorineural hearing loss of at least 50 decibels in both ears, being due in the case of at least one ear to noise at work;
(b) has worked in one or more of the nine occupations prescribed in relation to occupational deafness;
(c) has done such work for an aggregate period of at least ten years; and
(d) if no longer doing such work, claims benefit within five years of last doing so.

Where these conditions are satisfied, deafness is presumed to be due to employment.

War Pensions

Under the War Pensions scheme, benefit may be paid for disablement due to hearing loss which is attributable to, or aggrevated by, service in the armed forces. For sensorineural hearing loss, the claimant must be assessed as 20 per cent. disabled as a result of hearing loss of at least 50 decibles in both ears. For conductive hearing loss, the claimant must be assessed as at least 1 per cent. disabled. Doctors determine which type of deafness applies in each case.

There are no time limits for claiming under the War Pensions scheme, and no presumption of cause, but for claims arising within seven years of the termination of service, the onus is on my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the disablement is not due to a service factor. For claims arising more than seven years after the termination of service, the onus is on the claimant to show that disablement is due to service.

Benefit Rates

Weekly benefit rates are higher under the War Pensions scheme than under the Industrial Injuries scheme. The benefit rates for 1994-95 are:

Degree of disablement	*War pension (£)*	*Industrial injuries disablement benefit (£)*
100	98·90	93·20
90	89·01	83·88
80	79·12	74·56
70	69·23	65·24
60	59·34	55·92
50	49·45	46·60
40	39·56	37·28
30	29·67	27·96
20	19·78	18·64

Under the War Pensions scheme, benefit in respect of disablement due to conductive hearing loss assessed at less than 20 per cent. is paid as a lump sum gratuity.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what industries workers or former workers are eligible for consideration for industrial deafness.

Mr. Scott: Occupational deafness is prescribed for disablement benefit purposes in relation to the following occupational activities:

1. The use of powered (but not hand powered) grinding tools on cast metal (other than weld metal) or on billets or blooms in the metal producing industry, or work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of those tools whilst they are being so used;
2. The use of pneumatic percussive tools on metal, or work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of those tools whilst they are being so used;
3. The use of pneumatic percussive tools for drilling rock in quarries or underground or in mining coal, or work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of those tools whilst they are being so used;
4. Work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of plant (excluding power press plant) engaged in the forging (including drop stamping) of metal by means of closed or open dies or drop hammers;
5. Work in textile manufacturing where the work is undertaken wholly or mainly in rooms or sheds in which there are machines engaged in weaving man-made or natural (including mineral) fibres or in the high speed false twisting of fibres;
6. The use of, or work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of, machines engaged in cutting, shaping or cleaning metal nails;
7. The use of, or work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of, plasma spray guns engaged in the deposition of metal;
8. The use of, or work wholly or mainly in the immediate vicinity of, any of the following machines engaged in the working of wood or material composed partly of wood, that is to say; multi cutter moulding machines, planing machines, automatic or semi-automatic lathes, multiple cross-cut machines, automatic shaping machines, double-end tenoning machines, verticle spindle moulding machines (including high speed routing machines), edge banding machines, bandsawing machines with a blade width of not less than 75 millimetres and circular sawing machines in the operation of which the blade is moved towards the material being cut;
9. The use of chain saws in forestry.

I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) on 24 February, *Official Report*, column *368*, which sets out the further activities to be added to the list of prescribed occupations from October 1994.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received on industrial deafness in the last 12 months.

Mr. Scott: In the last 12 months a total of 25 letters from members of the public and hon. Members have been received concerning various aspects of benefits in respect of industrial deafness.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's involvement with training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Burt: This Department has no formal involvement with training and enterprise councils in England and Wales, nor with local enterprise companies, their Scottish equivalents.

Family Credit Scheme

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to introduce regulations regarding the £28 disregard under the family credit scheme in relation to child care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We expect the regulations to be laid in July before the recess. The legislation will come into effect from early October.

Benefit Reductions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the extent of the benefit reduction imposed in respect of claimants penalised for failing to attend a restart interview.

Mr. Burt: There is no benefit reduction for failing to attend an initial restart interview. But if a person fails, without good cause, to attend a second interview, the only entitlement will be under income support hardship rules. This entails a reduction of 40 per cent. in the single personal allowance—20 per cent if the claimant or a member of the family is pregnant or seriously ill and there is little or no capital. The reduction lasts until the claimant attends a rearranged interview or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State withdraws the notice of the interview. The effect of these reductions on income support allowances is shown in the table.

Age of claimant	*Personal allowance*	*Allowance less 40 per cent.*	*Allowance less 20 per cent.*
Under 18	27·50	16·50	22·00
18-24	36·15	21·70	28·90
25 and over	45·70	27·40	36·55

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how he will consult on the proposals for member-nominated trustees in occupational pension schemes as set out in his White Paper "Security, Equality, Choice: The Future for Pensions" published on 23 June.

Mr. Hague: A consultation paper is being issued today. The paper seeks views on the practical implications of our

proposals for the selection of member-nominated trustees and also on the arrangements for schemes to retain or adopt different arrangements where those arrangements have the support of a majority of members. It is being issued automatically to all those organisations that responded to the earlier DSS discussion papers and is available to others on request. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Widows' Pension

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the maximum weekly additional pension payable in each year since 1979-80 to a widow whose husband had died in the same year.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Year of death	*Notional[1] maximum additional pension (£)*
1979-80	1·54
1980-81	3·45
1981-82	5·86
1982-83	9·59
1983-84	12·40
1984-85	16·21
1985-86	20·87
1986-87	24·03
1987-88	29·11
1988-89	34·75
1989-90	41·34
1990-91	49·74
1991-92	57·10
1992-93	66·97
1993-94	76·04
1994-95	84·61

[1] Based on the amount of additional pension payable where a contributor has paid contributions of 53 x the upper earnings limit in each relevant tax year since 1978.

Household Income

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average household income of householders in *(a)* the London borough of Barking and Dagenham and *(b)* the London borough of Redbridge.

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the form requested. Statistics on patterns of household disposable income are available only for the United Kingdom as a whole and are provided in "Households Below Average Income 1979—1990-91" published in June 1993, a copy of which is in the Library.

One-stop Initiative

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what consultation there has been in the setting up of the one-stop initiative with *(a)* the Employment Service and *(b)* local authority housing benefit offices; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how the one-stop initiative will affect the running of both the Employment Service and local authority housing benefit offices *(a)* in dealing with the Benefits Agency on a day-to-day basis, *(b)* in the co-ordination of information, *(c)* in the possibilities of adopting the same or similar strategy and *(d)* estimated costs incurred; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The one-stop initiative is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Peter Pike, dated 27 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the One Stop initiative.

The decision to move towards a One Stop service followed overwhelmingly positive responses from customers, including local authorities and the Employment Service Agency (ESA), to a discussion paper published in September 1992.

The Benefits Agency's (BA) One Stop initiative does not affect the running of the ESA and local authority housing benefit offices, but in continuing our commitment to customer service we work closely to ensure that our distinct responsibilities are performed in as co-ordinated a way as possible.

Each local authority's circumstances are different. BA offices are encouraged to discuss local issues with the local authority concerned. Liaison arrangements have improved and each BA District now has a Service Level Agreement with the local authorities in its area. At a national level, the Local Authorities Association are regularly consulted on developments.

The framework for improved liaison between the ESA and the BA, announced in March 1993, established a series of initiatives to encourage closer working between the two agencies. These included piloting of the co-location of BA staff in ESA outlets to provide general benefit advice and information, and joint workshops/conferences to discuss common service areas.

We are constantly looking at ways of improving the transfer of information between our offices and the ESA and local authorities. For example, in June this year, the main computer systems supporting Income Support and Unemployment benefit were linked. This allows faster, automatic transmission of information and payment instructions between the agencies.

The introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance in April 1996 will see the BA, in partnership with the ESA, providing, wherever possible, a single point of contact for unemployed customers providing both jobseeking services and a gateway to the benefit and information services of the BA. This will be from a single location, wherever possible.

One Place, which is the first phase of One Stop, has been implemented from within existing allocations and therefore at no extra cost.

It is for each Agency and organisation to decide how best to meet their customers' needs when deciding their future strategies.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the adults who applied for national insurance numbers were refused by the Contributions Agency in each of the last five years; and of these how many were *(a)* women and *(b)* from an ethnic minority background.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the issue of national insurance numbers is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 27 June 1994:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency I am responsible for answering questions about relevant operational matters. I have been asked to reply to your question about what proportion of the adults who applied for National Insurance numbers (NINOs) were refused by the Contributions Agency in each of the last five years; and of these how many were *(a)* women and *(b)* from an ethnic minority background.

The Agency is unable to provide the details you have requested as no such records are kept. But over the last 5 years more than 1 million adults have applied for and have been given a NINO.

In order to obtain a NINO an adult must usually attend a Social Security office in person and complete the appropriate application form. In addition suitable evidence of identity must be provided.

NINOs are only needed by people who are paying NI contributions so that we can keep a record of their contributions, or by people who have claimed certain Social Security benefits. A NINO is likely to be refused when it is not needed for either of these purposes or when there are doubts about the validity of the application.

I am sorry that the precise information you have requested is not available but I hope that my reply has proved helpful. If you think I could give you any more details on this topic, I would be happy to try and do so.

Income Support

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the income support live load for the area directorates in England and Wales *(a)* for each quarter's date of count since May 1991 to the most recent date for which figures are available and *(b)* for each of the E, A and P cases; and what was the percentage change in each of the case types outlined in *(b)* between May 1991 and the most recent date for which figures are available;

(2) what was the income support live level for the area directorates in Scotland *(a)* for each quarter's date of count since May 1991 to the most recent date for which figures are available and *(b)* for each of the E cases, A cases and P cases; what were the percentage changes in each of the case types outlined in *(b)* and for each area directorate (i) between May 1991 and the most recent date for which figures are available and (ii) between May 1993 and the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Henry McLeish, dated 27 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions requesting various statistical information concerning Income Support cases from the area directorates in England, Scotland and Wales from May 1991.

I have enclosed the information you requested and a copy has been placed in the Library.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the most recently available income support live level for each of the local office and benefit agency districts in Scotland for each of the E, A and P cases;

(2) what is the most recently available figure for the income support live level *(a)* in each of his Department's offices and *(b)* by each Benefits Agency district in Scotland.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Henry McLeish, dated 27 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the Income Support live load in each Scottish Benefits Agency branch and district office.

I have enclosed the information you requested and a copy has been placed in the Library.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of administering the scheme for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Mr. Scott: The administration of industrial injuries disablement benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 27 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the administrative cost of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

There are two stages to the take on of claims for the new prescribed disease chronic bronchitis and emphysema (PD D12), for which Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit has been available since 13 September 1993 for people who have worked for at least 20 years underground in a coal mine.

Our current estimate of the administrative cost for the two stage take-on of claims to PD D12 is £15·7 million. This is based on an estimated 80,000 claims and covers the three financial years 1993-94 to 1995-96.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Social Fund

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases in each Benefits Agency district in Scotland in the most recent period for which data are available an application for *(a)* community care grant, *(b)* budget loan and *(c)* crisis loan met the criteria but was refused because of budgetary constraints or insufficient priority; and what that was as a proportion of the total number of (i) applications and (ii) refusals in each of the Benefits Agency districts.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Henry McLeish, dated 27 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the operation of the Social Fund in Scotland.

I have enclosed the information you requested, relating to 1993-94 and 1994-95 to date, and a copy has been placed in the Library.

The Social Fund Computer System (SFCS), introduced to Scotland during the period March 1993—January 1994, collects statistical items differently from the previous system and they are not directly comparable with previous years. The old system recorded reasons for refusal per application, whereas the SFCS records reasons for refusal per item requested. In cases where a partial award is made, a reason for refusal will also be appropriate. Therefore, the sum of all the reasons for refusal will not equal the number of application refusals.

Social Fund Officers (SFOs) ensure that the highest priority needs are met while adopting as consistent an approach as

possible. The Area SPO (District Office Manager) issues guidance on the order of priorities (high, medium or low) and the level of priority which can be sustained from the budget available to the District. Similarly, the District Office's budget, which must not be exceeded, has to be managed so that, as far as possible, similar levels of need can be met throughout the year.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for help from the social fund for budgetary loans and crisis loans were refused on the grounds of inability to pay; and what that was as a proportion of the total number of *(a)* loan applications and *(b)* loan refusals for each of the Benefit Agency districts in Scotland for each year since 1990-91 for each local office.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Henry McLeish, dated 27 June 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the operation of the Social Fund in Scotland.

I have enclosed the information you requested and a copy has been placed in the Library. The Social Fund Computer System, introduced to Scotland during the period March 1993—January 1994, collects statistical items differently from the previous system and they are not directly comparable with previous years.

The actual level of refusals on the grounds of inability to repay is very low. Money advice may be given to people in these circumstances on ways to reduce expenditure in order to maximise disposable income.

The guidance to Social Fund Officers advises that where a loan application is received, the possibility that a non-repayable Community Care Grant may be more appropriate should be considered first.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

HEALTH

Children's Beds, East London

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all current proposals for closures of children's wards and beds in east London; and if she will indicate on the basis of them being implemented *(a)* the number of children's beds remaining and *(b)* the number of children in the east London area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The provision of services for children in east London is for the national health service to decide locally, taking account of all the local circumstances and the needs of patients.

Patient Participation

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initiatives her Department has taken to further the development of patient participation.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department is involved in many projects which develop patient participation. These include patient representatives' projects in Brighton and Bristol, involvement of patients in the development of information for patients and regular meetings with the Patients Forum. The Department also supports the work of community health councils which are appointed by Parliament to represent patients' views.

We are conducting research to find out patients' views about the development of the patients charter. We have also met patients' organisations to look at charter standards.

In 1992 the National Health Service Executive issued guidance on "Local Voices" which sets out ways in which the public could be consulted about health services. In April 1994 the National Health Service Executive issued a leaflet "Including Local People" which included examples of good practice that showed how purchasers have involved local people. I wrote in January this year to all district health authorities to ensure that the arrangements were in place to seek and act upon the views of local people. The responses to that letter indicate that most health authorities have made significant progress.

The chief executive of the National Health Service Executive has written to regional directors to ensure that the appropriate action is taken locally and will report to me later this year.

The National Health Service Executive funded the College of Health's research into consumer audit. The College of Health has developed consumer audit as a means of obtaining qualitative feedback from patients about health care. The consumer audit guidelines were published in March 1994.

Care Charges

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued on charging patients or their carers for *(a)* domiciliary care, *(b)* day care, or *(c)* respite care within the national health service.

Mr. Bowis: None. There are no charges for these services when delivered to national health service patients.

Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by her Department or agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) any other services in 1980 to 1983, 1984 to 1987, 1988 to 1991 and 1992-1993.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hague) gave him on 24 June, *Official Report*, columns *342-44*, for information prior to 1992-93, which includes information on health projects.

Information for 1992-93 is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mortality Rate

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the figures for post-operative deaths by district health authority for each of the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: Accurate information about post-operative deaths in each district health authority is not available. Information on deaths in hospitals in the national

health service in England was published in table 17 of the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin entitled "NHS Hospital Activity Statistics: England 1981 to 1991-92". Information is given on the percentage of cases in the acute sector discharged dead by regional health authority. A copy is available in the Library. Post-operative deaths which occur after patients have been discharged from hospital are not recorded.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decisions her Department has taken in respect of TECs over the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement on her Department's involvement with TECs over the same period.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Gold Salts

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific guidelines and advice is available for the prescription of the salt of gold sodium aurothiomolate to treat severe conditions of active rheumatical arthritis and its possible side effects.

Dr. Mawhinney: Decisions about the use of sodium aurothiomolate in the treatment of rheumatical arthritis are matters for the medical practitioners concerned.

Repetitive Strain Injury

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will discuss with the north Staffordshire repetitive strain injury support group the setting up of a working party to develop an action programme to prevent repetitive strain injury and to respond to the needs of those suffering from it.

Mr. Sackville: Prevention of repetitive strain injury when caused by work is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments there were in London in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1993; and how many there are planned to be in the year 2000.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) on 22 February, *Official Report* columns *210-11*.

It is the responsibility of local health authorities to assess and secure the health services, including accident and emergency, needed by their resident populations.

Hospitals and Bed Provision

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* beds and *(b)* hospitals she plans to close in the next eight years.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change in the number of NHS hospital beds she expects by *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2002.

Mr. Sackville: It is not possible to make detailed predictions about the future disposition and numbers of hospitals or hospital beds. These are matters for local determination. Changes will occur with fluctuations in local need and the development of clinical practice.

Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority's restriction on non-emergency treatment.

Mr. Sackville: It is the health authority's role to assess the health needs of its resident population and secure services to meet those needs.

Obscene Publications Branch

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place with the social work profession on the implications of the possible closure of the obscene publications branch at Scotland Yard for children who can become victims of pornography and organised child abuse.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department in terms of protecting children from the abuse associated with the production of child pornography of the proposed reduction in the resources of the obscene publications branch at Scotland Yard.

Mr. Bowis: The organisation of the obscene publications branch is a matter for the Metropolitan police. I refer my hon. Friend to the Adjournment debate on 22 June, *Official Report*, columns 332-40.

Alternative Medicines

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Her Majesty's Government will ensure that any European directive harmonising rules relating to the sale, dispensing and prescribing of vitamin and mineral supplements shall not reduce the existing scope of legally available alternative medicines available in the United Kingdom nor the work of qualified practitioners of nutritional therapy and medical herbalists.

Mr. Sackville: In general, alternative medicines and vitamin and mineral supplements for which medicinal claims are made are subject to the provisions of the Medicines Act but herbal remedies prepared and prescribed by herbalists for individual patients are exempt from the licensing requirements. No proposals have been made for a directive to harmonise the status of vitamin and mineral supplements and we have no plans to change the existing arrangements governing the availability of alternative medicines.

Welsh Health Planning Forum

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she received the report of the Welsh Health Planning Forum published on 23 June; and what is her assessment of its conclusions on the impact of bed closures and the potential for keyhole surgery and day case operations.

Mr. Sackville: We have not had the opportunity to study the report. The national health service has already

achieved a 160 per cent. increase in day cases between 1982 and 1992-93. We are determined to promote all practices that improve the quality of care for patients.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died from skin cancer in 1993.

Mr. Sackville: Data from 1993 are not yet available. In 1992, in England, there were 1,065 deaths from malignant melanoma of skin (ICD[1] 172) and 457 deaths from other malignant neoplasm of skin (ICD[1] 173).

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers have been reported in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information is shown in the table.

	Malignant melanoma of skin (ICD[1] 172)	*Other malignant neoplasm of skin (ICD[1] 173)*[2]
England[3]	3,661	30,250
Wales[3]	220	1,748
Scotland[4]	477	4,111
Northern Ireland[4]	46	573

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.
[2] Other malignant neoplasm of skin is under-registered.
[3] 1988 data.
[4] 1991 data.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated current cost per case of treating a patient with *(a)* malignant melanoma of the skin and *(b)* other malignant neoplasm of the skin.

Mr. Sackville: The costs of specific procedures or those associated with specific diagnoses are not available centrally.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the mortality and incidence rates, per 100,000 population, for malignant melanoma of skin, ICD 172, and other malignant neoplasm of skin, ICD 173, for each year since 1991.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information is shown in the table.

Incidence and mortality rates per 100,000 population in England for malignant melanoma of skin (ICD[1] 172) and other malignant neoplasm of skin (ICD[1] 173)

	Incidence (1988)	*Mortality (1992)*
Malignant melanoma of skin	7·7	2·2
Other malignant neoplasm of skin	63·5	0·9

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.

General Practitioners

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data has been collected by her Department on the administrative costs of *(a)* fundholding and *(b)* non-fundholding arrangements in general practice.

Dr. Mawhinney: The administrative costs of purchasing by general practitioner fundholders are about 2 per cent. of budgets set. Comparable information about the purchasing costs of district health authorities on behalf of non-fundholding general practitioners is not available.

Necrotising Fasciitis

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the misclassification of necrotising fasciitis on *(a)* death certificates and *(b)* hospital finished consultant episodes and data of disease and treatment.

Mr. Sackville: No studies have been done to ascertain what doctors record on the death certificates of patients who have had necrotising fasciitis. From 1990 to 1992, when necrotising fasciitis was given as the underlying cause of death, this was coded by Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys as "fasciitis unspecified" using the international classification of disease index.

Hospital League Tables

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for publishing league tables for NHS hospitals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall tomorrow publish the first National Health Service performance tables: copies will be placed in the Library at 11 am and available in the Vote Office.

Special Hospitals

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) where the two new special hospitals are to be built; and when they will become operational;

(2) if she will make it her policy that special hospitals shall not be granted trust status;

(3) when the Reed report on special hospitals will be published; and what has been the reason for the length of time between its completion and publication.

Mr. Bowis: We have not reached any firm conclusions on the future of high security services. There are no current plans to build new special hospitals or to change the status of existing special hospitals. The report of the working group on high security services raises important issues about service development which require careful consideration by this and other Government Departments. We hope to publish the report soon.

Private Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance her Department has given to NHS trust hospitals about charging patients for use of private beds when no NHS beds are available;

(2) what guidelines her Department issued about the use of empty private beds in trust hospitals when all NHS beds are full.

Mr. Sackville: All beds in national health service hospitals can be used by patients receiving NHS treatment.

General Practitioners

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reviews her Department has commissioned of the administrative cost of general practitioner fundholding; and when she intends to publish the results of those reviews.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. The National Health Service Executive will be reviewing the current system of management allowances for general practitioner fundholders during the summer.

Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what reports she has received from the advisory committee on dangerous pathogens concerning Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; and if she will place these in the Library;

(2) what precautions have been introduced for laboratory staff who may be handling materials contaminated with the agents causing *(a)* Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and *(b)* bovine spongiform encephalopathy;

(3) what guidance she has received from the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies; when that guidance was received; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Specific guidance from the advisory committee on dangerous pathogens will be available shortly.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training

6. **Sir Michael Grylls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made in the past nine months in improving delivery of the youth training guarantee in England.

Miss Widdecombe: Excellent progress.

Employment Service

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the Employment Service's results against the annual performance agreement set for the 1993-94 year; and when he expects the Employment Service to publish its annual report and accounts.

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce that the Employment Service has continued to build on the success of recent years and in 1993-94 achieved an excellent level of performance against its annual targets. The following table details the ES's performance results against the 1993-94 annual performance agreement. Overall, the ES placed 1·64 million unemployed people into jobs, of whom 462,200—28·2 per cent.—had been out of work for six months or more and 53,300—3·25 per cent.—were people with a disability; performance in each case exceeded target. In addition, the ES met or exceeded its targets for promptness of benefit payment, delivering advisory interviews and for claims withdrawn following fraud investigation, and ended a mere fraction—0·1 per cent. —short of its target for benefit accuracy.

I am also pleased to announce that for the 1993-94 year and beyond the ES will be publishing fully audited commercial style accounts in its annual report. The ES's annual report and accounts for 1993-94 will be laid before Parliament, as an Act Paper, after the summer recess. In previous years, the ES's annual report and accounts has not been formally laid, and has included only an unaudited cash based financial statement. I am confident that the fuller, commercial-style accounts will serve to emphasise the extent to which the ES delivers value for taxpayers' money.

Target	*Performance*	*(per cent.)*
1.47 million unemployed people to be placed into work	1·64 million	
Of whom:		
27 per cent. to be long-term claimants	462,200	(28·2)
3 per cent. to be people with disabilities	53,300	(3·25)
35 per cent. to be people in inner cities	580,600	(35·4)
65 per cent. of starters on Training for Work to be from Employment Service referrals		74·0
87 per cent. of clients due an advisory interview to receive one		92·0
30 per cent. of unemployed people due a 12 month advisory interview to start on a Jobplan Workshop		45·0
87 per cent. of first benefit payments to be despatched on the day that entitlement is established		89·4
96·5 per cent. by value, of Unemployment benefit payments to be paid correctly		96·4
9 per cent. of initial claims enquiries not to be pursued as new claims		8·9
63,000 claims to be withdrawn following investigation by Employment Service inspectors	67,400	

Long-term Unemployment, Merseyside

15. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for the long-term unemployed men and women on Merseyside.

Mr. David Hunt: The Employment Service and the local training and enterprise councils already offer the widest-ever range of employment, enterprise and training opportunities for long-term unemployed people on Merseyside.

17. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the transfer of undertakings directive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have had discussions with counterparts from a number of other EU countries concerning revision of the acquired rights directive.

Labour Statistics

18. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by how much unemployment has changed in each EU country since January 1993.

Mr. David Hunt: Claimant unemployment in the United Kingdom is down by over 300,000 since January 1993, while registered unemployment in the rest of Europe rose by 1·5 million.

19. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new full-time equivalent jobs have been created during the past 15 months.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department does not believe that full-time equivalence is a meaningful concept. However, the labour force survey shows that total hours worked rose by 0·6 per cent. over the year to winter 1993.

20. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women, excluding those on training schemes, were in (i) full-time and (ii) part-time jobs in June 1979 and at the latest date for which figures are available; and in how many standard planning regions the number of jobs has increased for (1) men and (2) women, considering part-time and full-time separately.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is provided in the table:

Employees and self-employed: Great Britain (thousands)

	Male			Female		
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
June 1979	—[1]	—[1]	14,762	—[1]	—[1]	9,805
September 1984	12,716	919	13,635	5,574	4,205	9,779
March 1994	11,602	1,292	12,895	5,986	5,165	11,151
Number of regions where employees have increased (September 1984 to March 1994)	—[1]	—[1]	0	10	11	10

[1] Not available.

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed for *(a)* more than one year and *(b)* more than two years in (i) Greater London and (ii) the Streatham parliamentary constituency; and what were the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on the levels of claimant unemployment by duration is available from 1983, on the unadjusted basis only, for the months of January, April, July and October. It can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the unemployment figures are for Devon for May 1994; and what percentage change they represent on the figures for May 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: Unadjusted claimant unemployment figures in the county of Devon stood at 44,405 in May 1994, a fall of 1·6 per cent. since May 1992. However, between May 1993 and May 1994, unemployment fell by over 11 per cent.

28. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of unemployed people in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In May, seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment stood at 2,661,000, a fall of 258,000 on a year ago.

21. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently unemployed in the Basildon constituency; and what was the figure one year ago.

Miss Widdecombe: Between May 1993 and May 1994 unadjusted claimant unemployment in Basildon fell by 959 from 6,500 to 5,541.

Unemployment

23. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the major European countries where unemployment is on a clear downward trend.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Only the United Kingdom.

24. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom textile and paper and board industries.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimates from the winter 1993-94 labour force survey are that there were 29,000 unemployed people—on the International Labour Organisation definition—who last worked in the textiles and textile produces industry and 17,000 unemployed people who last worked in the manufacture of pulp, paper and paper products industry.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the level of unemployment among younger men has changed during the past 12 months.

Miss Widdecombe: In the United Kingdom between April 1993 to April 1994, unadjusted claimant unemployment among 18 to 24-year-old men fell by 73,435—13 per cent.

Modern Apprenticeships

22. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the progress of his new apprenticeship initiative in the east midlands.

Miss Widdecombe: Four training and enterprise councils in the east midlands are at the forefront of the development of modern apprenticeships.

25. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the Government's modern apprenticeship scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: Employers have given an overwhelmingly positive response to the challenge set by modern apprenticeships, and prototypes are due to be in place by September.

Public Services (Privatisation)

26. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action he intends to take in response to the decision of the European Court of Justice that the British Government are in breach of European law by failing to ensure adequate worker representation in the privatisation of public services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government are considering the judgment.

OECD Report

27. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had on the recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report with colleagues in the EU; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have discussed the OECD report with colleagues on several occasions, in particular at the ministerial meeting in Paris on 7 June. There has been strong support for its conclusions. The report makes it clear that flexible skills and working practices are a crucial factor in reducing unemployment; and that statutory minimum wages and excessive non-wage labour costs reduce employment prospects, particularly for young people.

Women's Issues Working Group

29. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how regularly the women's issues working group meets; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The women's issues working group meets three times a year. It is a personal advisory group chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State which considers some of the obstacles encountered by women in their working lives, and advises on ways to overcome them. It currently has 14 members.

Restart

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many claimants have *(a)* lost and *(b)* suffered a reduction in benefit because of (i) their failure to turn up to a Restart interview and (ii) their failure to adopt the course of action advocated at their interview, in each year since Restart began;

(2) how many claimants have *(a)* lost unemployment benefit and *(b)* suffered a reduction in supplementary benefit or income support because of their failure to satisfy the availability for work rules for each year since 1974.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people are currently on the Restart programme;

(2) if those people on Restart programmes are included in the official unemployment statistics.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. G. Johnson to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 28 June 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the numbers of people currently on the Restart Programme and whether they are included in the official unemployment statistics. I am replying in the Chief Executive's absence.

It may help if I explain that Restart is not a programme but a series of regular six monthly interviews with an adviser, for people who have been unemployed for six months or more. These interviews provide clients with the opportunity to discuss their situation, consider the options available and agree a course of action which, if taken, will offer the best prospects of finding a job. Advisers also make sure that clients understand and continue to meet the conditions for receipt of benefit. The number of Restart interviews that have taken place in 1993-94 is 2,800,000. The clients involved are included in the official unemployment statistics.

For those people who are still unsure about which course of action to take, Restart Courses are available. These are designed to give participants a more in-depth opportunity to assess their strengths and skills and become aware of local opportunities available to them in planning steps back to work. The courses also provide guidance and help in job search.

In the 12 months from April 1993 until March 1994 over 143,000 people started on a Restart Course. From April this year 22,000 have started on a course.

Participants remain on the unemployment register and continue to receive normal unemployment benefits whilst attending the course. They are, therefore, included in the official unemployment statistics. Fares to and from the course are also paid.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the numbers attending Restart interviews for each year since 1986 and the outcome of these interviews for each year in question;

(2) how many benefit reductions have been made each year since section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 has come into force.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which TECs currently offer extended child care places to children aged five years and over outside normal school hours and during school holidays; and how many places each TEC has available.

Miss Widdecombe: From April 1994, all training and enterprise councils will be making grants available to help establish new after-school and holiday-care places under the Government's out-of-school child-care initiative. A total of 50,000 new places are expected to be created across Britain by March 1996.

In 1993-94 a limited number of TECs ran the initiative. Latest available figures in the following table show the number of places notified by each TEC as created up to March 1994.

Cumulative places created by March 1994

	Quarter 4
England	4,019
Heart of England	0
Kent	164
Milton Keynes	0
Thames Valley	248

	Quarter 4
AZTEC	40
London East	24
North London	58
South Thames	133
Bedfordshire	168
Hertfordshire	555
Norfolk and Waveney	144
Avon	24
Devon and Cornwall	181
Dorset	0
Gloucestershire	64
Somerset	41
Wiltshire	62
Central England	126
Coventry	292
Hawtec	24
Shropshire	60
Walsall	52
Greater Nottinghamshire	0
Leicester	0
Lincolnshire	0
North Nottinghamshire	80
Humberside	96
Sheffield	222
Rotherham	92
Calderdale/Kirklees	55
METROTEC	90
Rochdale	140
South and East Cheshire	211
CEWTEC	4
Cumbria	136
ELTEC	16
County Durham	80
Northumberland	52
Teeside	40
Tyneside	245

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* black and *(b)* Asian people serve on each TEC; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on the ethnic origin of training and enterprise council board members is provided voluntarily by the TECs. The following table shows that there are 38 TEC board members of ethnic origin on the board of 28 TECs. This information may not give the complete picture of the ethnic origin of TEC board members. TECs are private companies and are responsible for the composition of their own boards.

Number of TEC board members of ethnic origin

Training and Enterprise Council	Number
Avon	1
Bedfordshire	2
Birmingham	3
Bolton/Bury	1
Calderdale/Kirklees	1
CAMBSTEC (Central/South Cambridgeshire)	1
CILNTEC (City and Inner London North)	1
Coventry and Warwickshire	1
Greater Nottingham	1
Greater Peterborough	1
Hampshire	1
Hertfordshire	1
Leeds	1
Leicestershire	2
London East	1
Manchester	1
Milton Keynes and North Bucks	1
North London	3
North West London	3
Oldham	1
Rochdale	1
Rotherham	1
Sandwell	1
Shropshire	1
SOLOTEC	2
South Thames	2
Walsall	1
Wolverhampton	1
TOTAL	38

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many civil servants in his Department took early retirement on being seconded to work for a training and enterprise council.

Miss Widdecombe: None. While on secondment working for a training and enterprise council, all departmental staff remained employees of the Department.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 18 May, *Official Report* column *505*, what information was given to the chairman of the training and enterprise councils, concerning the rights of civil servants seconded to the TECs to be eligible for the voluntary early retirement scheme and pertaining to their permanent employment with those TECs after completion of their secondment period.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils were told that the early retirement schemes were not meant for secondees who intended taking up TEC employment.

Child Care

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the out-of-school child care initiative; and what are his future plans for the initiative.

Miss Widdecombe: The out-of-school child care initiative was piloted in 40 training and enterprise council areas in 1993-94, leading to the creation of over 4,000 after school and holiday places. From April 1994 to March 1996, the initiative will be delivered by every TEC, and we hope to create up to 50,000 new places across Great Britain.

European Employment Legislation

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with the European Commission about the implementation of EU employment legislation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Community's agenda must now be focused on creating jobs rather than destroying them through unnecessary employment regulations. The United Kingdom is playing a leading part in efforts to improve Europe's competitiveness in this and other ways.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 June 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Personal Injury Cases

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average value, as stated by plaintiffs, of those personal injury claims commenced in the county courts for each year since 1990.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not recorded throughout the year but only from cases concluded during the months of March and November. From these samples, the average figures can be projected as follows:

Year	£
1990	3,273·71
1991	3,561·31
1992	3,956·86
1993	5,054·47
1994	6,895·96

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many lawyers currently employed by his Department have a minimum of three years experience in dealing with personal injury cases.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No statistics are kept on the information which the hon. Member seeks, and it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the main concerns expressed by respondents to the consultation paper entitled, "Small Personal Injury Claims."

Mr. John M. Taylor: Approximately 150 responses to the consultation paper were received and they are currently being evaluated. Respondents came from a wide variety of interested groups and their responses varied accordingly in scope and tone. The majority of respondents who disagreed with the proposals were those who consider the small claims procedure an inappropriate forum for personal injury claims under any circumstances, particularly because it limits recoverable costs.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will define the meaning of non-standard injury as set out in paragraph 33, part a, in the consultation paper, "Small Personal Injury Claims."

Mr. John M. Taylor: Paragraphs 31 to 34 of the consultation paper set out the safeguard which will ensure that each case is dealt with in the appropriate forum according to subject matter, and not value alone. It is proposed that, where a district judge decides that a case is unsuited to arbitration, for example because an injury had come about in complex circumstances or was of unpredictable severity, he would be able to refer the matter for trial.

District Judges

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will outline the full range of duties, other than disposing of cases by trial, which are performed by district judges.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A description of the jurisdiction and duties of the office of district judge is contained in the consultation paper "Developments in Judicial Appointments Procedures" which was issued on 19 May 1994. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and (i) Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1998 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information that the Department has about these types of contract relates only to 1992-93 and is not broken down in a way which allows the question to be answered in the detail sought. However, on the best information currently available, total expenditure on external consultants during that year was £3.455 million. For projects costing less than £20,000 no detailed information is readily available, but for those above that amount which were completed in that year, the details are as follows:

Consultants	*Number of contracts*	*amount £000's*
Coopers & Lybrand	2	57
KPMG	2	115
Ernst & Young	2	52
Price Waterhouse	6	1,396

NORTHERN IRELAND

Water and Sewerage Services

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the reorganisation of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland in advance of the privatisation of these services.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the reorganisation of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland in advance of the privatisation of these services.

Mr. Tim Smith: As my hon. Friend, the then Minister of State made clear to the House on 20 April 1993, the

Government remain committed to the privatisation of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland as soon as practicable, but will not be able to do so, for tehnical reasons, during the lifetime of the present Parliament. In the interim, I have decided that the Water Executive of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the delivery of water and sewerage services, should become a "next steps" agency not later than April 1996. This will enable the Water Executive to operate as a separate unit in the Department, within a framework of appropriate efficiency targets and performance measures, and will build on work to develop the commercial orientation of the organisation.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland in 1994-95.

Mr. Tim Smith: For 1994-95, the following key performance targets have been set for the agency:

To meet an overall efficiency gain of 2 per cent.

To reduce the unit cost per vehicle excise enforcement case completed to £21·73 (at 1992-93 prices).

To dispatch 90 per cent. of registration books for new vehicles within 16 working days of the receipt of application.

To dispatch 90 per cent. of refunds of vehicle excise duty within 11 working days of receipt.

To dispatch 92 per cent. of vehicle excise licences within six working days of receipt of postal applications.

To dispatch 92 per cent. of duplicate vehicle registration books within six working days of receipt of applications.

To dispatch 96 per cent. of amended vehicle registration books (following changes to vehicles or keepers) within eight working days of receipt of applications.

To dispatch 91 per cent. of ordinary driving licences within 11 working days of receipt of applications.

To dispatch 96 per cent. of vocational driving licences within 11 working days of receipt of applications.

To dispatch 91 per cent. of provisional driving licences within 10 working days of receipt of applications.

To dispatch substantive replies to 90 per cent. of written inquiries within four working days of receipt.

To limit maximum waiting time at local vehicle licensing offices to 25 minutes during peak periods (the first eight and last two working days of each month) and 10 minutes at other periods.

To reduce the error rate (errors on any item sent out by the agency) to 0·5 per cent. of total agency output.

PRIME MINISTER

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met representatives of organisations for, and of, disabled people to discuss the need for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation; when he next plans to meet such representatives; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have had a number of meetings with interested parties. My right hon. Friend, the Minister for Disabled People, has also had a number of such meetings, including one with the all-party disablement group on 15 March. He keeps me fully informed of the issues which are discussed.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in relation to access by disabled people to buildings open to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

Section 4 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and section 4 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 oblige those who provide buildings which are visited by members of the public to make provision for disabled people. In addition, the Government have introduced provisions within building regulations for the benefit of such people. These provisions apply predominantly to new buildings and some extensions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pigs

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amounts have been received in EC subsidies and support by British, French and German pig farmers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: The CAP pigmeat regime is lightweight and very little direct support is available.

Under the guarantee section of the common agriculture policy—FEOGA—expenditure on export refunds and private storage aid for pigmeat, neither of which are paid direct to producers, was as follows:

(ecu million)

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993 (provisional)*
United Kingdom					
Export Refunds	2·250	3·724	3·141	2·433	2·673
Private Storage Aid	0·356	0·000	0·227	0·108	0·000
Total	2·606	3·724	3·368	2·541	2·673
France					
Export Refunds	12·657	4·628	6·391	3·277	6·236
Private Storage Aid	12·610	0·257	1·928	0·183	–0·134
Total	25·267	4·885	8·319	3·460	6·102
Germany					
Export Refunds	6·028	22·072	47·824	–20·260	32·485
Private Storage Aid	6·984	–0·143	2·530	0·378	–0·885
Exceptional Support	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000	2·063
Total	13·012	21·929	50·354	–19·882	33·663

Copies of the FEOGA financial reports are in the House of Commons Library.

Refunds for certain pigmeat exports to non-EC countries are available to all member states. Germany has traditional markets in eastern Europe and is the third largest exporter of pigmeat from the EC to third countries.

Private storage aid schemes, when introduced by the EC, are also available to all member states and provide short-term relief from difficulties caused by seasonal oversupply of the pigmeat market. The United Kingdom pigmeat industry generally sees PSA schemes as being of little benefit and United Kingdom take up is very small.

Exceptional support measures can be introduced by the EC when orderly marketing cannot otherwise take place. As a result of outbreaks of classical swine fever in Germany, where movement restrictions exist, 2·063 mecu was paid during the 1993 FEOGA budget year and 56 mecu has so far been paid this year. No such measures have needed to be introduced in France or the United Kingdom.

EC veterinary funds can be made available to assist member states in eradicating certain animal diseases, including pig diseases. No such payments have been made to the United Kingdom in the last five years and details of any payments to France or Germany are not available to us.

On capital grant schemes, the ministry has paid £5·7 million to pig producers since 1989. A small element of this is reimbursed by the EC. Figures for France and Germany are not available to us.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list those of her Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to consult prior to legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish their response to advice supplied by them.

Mr. Jack: Prior to legislation proposals, the Government are required to consult the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, the Committee on Agricultural Valuation, the Sugar Beet Research and Education Council and the Veterinary Products Committee. They are not required to publish their responses.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department which have a statutory basis.

Mr. Jack: The following non-departmental public bodies have a statutory basis:

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides
The Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees
The Consumers' Committees for Great Britain and for England and Wales
The Committees of Investigation for Great Britain and for England and Wales
The Committee on Agricultural Valuation
The Hill Farming Advisory Committee
The Veterinary Products Committee.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list her Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to produce annual reports.

Mr. Jack: Only the Veterinary Products Committee is required to produce an annual report, but the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and the Food Advisory Committee also do so.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department which are required to lay their annual reports before Parliament.

Mr. Jack: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advisory bodies she has set up in her Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993".

Mr. Jack: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list her Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to publish their advice to Government.

Mr. Jack: None, but in practice a number do so.

Meat Imports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the countries, in order of frequency, from which meat treated with *(a)* clenbuterol and *(b)* other beta-agonists has been imported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Soames: Beta-agonists—which include clenbuterol—are a group of drugs which have been used for a number of years in licensed veterinary medicines to treat respiratory ailments in cattle and horses and as an aid to cattle at the time of calving. There are no requirements for those importing meat into the United Kingdom to declare whether it has come from animals treated with these medicinal products. I regret therefore that I cannot supply the hon. Member with the information requested.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the number of cases of bovine TB in cattle imported from Ireland in each year since 1990 and in each month of 1994.

Mr. Soames: The number of confirmed cases of bovine TB in cattle imported from Ireland in each year since 1990 were:

	Number
1990	12
1991	18
1992	3
1993	4
1994	[1]Nil

[1] Provisional figure as at 28 June.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what methods of screening Irish cattle for bovine TB are in place; and what measures she intends to introduce.

Mr. Soames: All Irish cattle, except bullocks, are tested for bovine tuberculosis 60 days after importation. In addition, all animals in herds maintained by or which have regular intakes of Irish cattle are tested annually. The routine testing interval for herds which import bullocks from Ireland for fattening purposes is set at the discretion of the divisional veterinary officer. No further measures are considered necessary.

Dumb Cane

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to bring forward measures to restrict the sale from supermarkets, garden centres and other retail outlets of Dieffenbachia picta—Dumb Cane—and other species of that genus, or to make the prominent display of safety warning labels mandatory at sites of sale; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The conditions under which potentially hazardous plants are sold by supermarkets and garden centres is a matter currently being considered by the horticultural industry. An industry voluntary code of practice is in the final stages of preparation and is expected to be published later in the summer. This is an industry-led initiative and a good example of self-regulation.

Fish Marketing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what fish producing organisations were consulted on her marketing development scheme.

Mr. Jack: The following organisations with an interest in fisheries were consulted on the proposals for the marketing development scheme:

Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
Anglo-Scottish Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
British Crayfish Marketing Association
Cornish Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
Fleetwood Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
Grimsby Fish Producers' Organisations
Institute of Fisheries Management
Lowestoft Fish Producers' Organisation
National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
New British Trout Association
Salmon and Trout Association
Shellfish Association of Great Britain
South Western Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.
United Kingdom Association of Fish Producers' Organisations
Yorkshire and Anglia Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is her Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Jack: The Department's policy is to review the scope for publication on a case-by-case basis having regard to the code of practice on open government and agreed contractual terms covering commercial confidentiality. The Department may in some cases publish a synopsis of the report rather than the report itself.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by her Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Jack: Over the period April 1992 to date the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by the Department in relation to market testing is estimated to be £684,000.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Broadcasting

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to alternative sources of revenue for the BBC other than licence fees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Our consultation document on the future of the BBC, published in November 1992, invited views on a number of possible alternatives to the licence fee. The Government's conclusions will be set out in the White Paper that we plan to publish shortly.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total licence revenue of the BBC arising from those purchasing licences in *(a)* England, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales; and what proportion of the total income of the BBC is represented by revenue derived from television licences.

Mr. Brooke: BBC licence fee income for 1992-93 was £1,597·7 million. This represented 87 per cent. of total BBC income in 1992-93. Figures for television licence revenue by country are not available. However, the number of television licences in force by country as at 31 March 1993 was:

	Number
England	16,869,000
Northern Ireland	338,000
Scotland	1,724,000
Wales	1,066,000

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment has been made by his Department of the value for money provided by the BBC to its viewers, in relation to the cost of a television licence and to the services provided by other networks.

Mr. Brooke: We appointed independent consultants, Touche Ross, in mid-1993 to advise on the level of the television licence fee from 1994-96. The study, as well as examining the BBC's progress in pursuing efficiency measures, included comparisons of the BBC's performance and staff costs with those of commercial broadcasters. A copy of the management summary of the study is in the Library. I announced the Government's decision on the future level of the licence fee on 4 November 1993 at columns *309-10*.

Yorkshire Mining Museum

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the future of the Yorkshire Mining museum, Caphouse.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* I visited the Yorkshire mining museum on Friday 10 December. I was very impressed by what I saw. The chairman of the trustees, Councillor Norman Hartshorne, the then

vice-chairman, Councillor Robert Mitchell, and the director of the museum, Dr. Margaret Faull, explained to me the financial difficulties which the museum would face, following the restructuring of the coal industry. These difficulties arose mainly from the fact that the traditional help in kind to the museum from British Coal would no longer be available. I said that I would do everything I properly could, consistent with the DNH's relationship with other museums, to help.

The Government have now decided that the Department of National Heritage will receive additional provision in order to give the Yorkshire mining museum, the only mining museum in England with underground workings, transitional assistance of £300,000, spread over three years. The Museums and Galleries Commission has agreed to administer the provision of this financial assistance. My officials will shortly be discussing with the commission the arrangements for doing this.

I shall be looking for further, non-financial ways to help ensure the profitable continuance of the Yorkshire mining museum—although I emphasise that the future of the Yorkshire mining museum is for its trustees to determine. I wrote on Friday 24 June to the director of the museum suggesting an early meeting to discuss such matters. In the meantime, I have asked Sir Neil Cossons, director of the National Museum of Science and Industry, if he would be prepared to give the Yorkshire mining museum his advice on a wide range of relevant subjects, including sponsorship. He has generously agreed.

The future of the mining museums, so central to the history of Britain's industrial development, and thus to her wealth, and to her role and influence in the rest of the world, will be one of the subjects to which I want to pay particular attention in the review that my Department is undertaking of our policy towards the whole museum sector.

I should like to thank my hon. Friend, the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) among others on both sides of the House, for their valuable advice.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touch Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advise, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

The Attorney-General: The information is given in the table:

£ thousands

Sums[1]/Contracts[2] Firms[3]	1980-83	1984-87	1988-92[5]	1992-93
Coopers & Lybrand				
(vii)	—	—	1,374 (4)	2,233 (2)
KPMG Peat Marwick				
(vi)	—	—	100[4] (1)	—
(vii)	—	—	1,397 (4)	2,431 (0)
Ernst & Young				
(vii)	—	—	963 (7)	250 (0)
Price Waterhouse				
(ii)	—	—	—	5 (1)
(vii)	—	—	1,528 (5)	264 (0)
Arthur Andersen				
(vii)	—	—	96 (1)	—
Touche Ross				
(vi)	—	—	9 (1)	5 (1)
(vii)	—	—	426 (4)	11 (0)
Grant Thornton				
(vii)	—	—	1,072 (5)	109 (0)
Robson Rhodes				
(vii)	—	—	146 82)	5 (0)
Pannell Kerr Forster	—	—	—	—

[1] The sums of money are the amounts spent on contracts, both new and continuing, during the financial years covered by the period.
[2] The figures in brackets are the number of new contracts let during the financial years covered by the period.
[3] Includes predecessor firms.
[4] Estimate.
[5] 31 March 1992.

ENVIRONMENT

Recycling

2. **Mr. Coe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made towards the Government's target of recycling 25 per cent. of reusable household waste.

Mr. Atkins: Recovery of household waste will increase dramatically as a result of the producer responsibility challenges which we have set for the packaging and newsprint industries and others.

Packaging alone is over 20 per cent. of household waste and the industry draft plan aims to recover 58 per cent. of packaging waste by 2000 and to extend close-to-home recycling facilities to eight out of 10 homes.

19. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to encourage recycling.

Mr. Gummer: Our policy is to help promote recycling through a wide range of measures including the recent producer responsibility initiative, which means that those who make and sell products and packaging should take a share of responsibility for the beneficial re-use of their waste. Current producer responsibility initiatives cover packaging, newspapers, batteries, tyres, vehicles and electronic equipment.

Water Metering

9. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the chairmen of the main water companies about the introduction of compulsory water metering for domestic households.

Mr. Atkins: The Secretary of State has discussions with the chairmen of water companies from time to time. Alternative methods of charging to replace rateable values are sometimes discussed. It is for each company to decide on an appropriate basis for charging, but metering, which relates charges to consumption, has many advantages.

Wildlife Sites

15. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statutory protection there is for important wildlife sites that do not qualify as sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Gummer: The Government encourage local authorities to make full use of their powers under section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. They should also adopt appropriate policies in their development plans and under planning legislation to protect such sites.

Local Government Finance

16. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to revise future revenue support grant allocations to local authorities, so as to improve the sums granted to councils in Devon and Cornwall relative to those in the south east of England.

Mr. Curry: We are discussing with the local authority associations a number of possible changes in the allocation of revenue support grant.

33. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the local government support grant for urban authorities for 1995-96.

Mr. Curry: We are discussing with the local authority associations a number of possible changes in the allocation of revenue support grant.

24. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the funding of local services on Merseyside.

Mr. Baldry: I have nothing to add to the full reply I gave in response to the hon. Member's Adjournment debate on 26 May 1994, *Official Report*, columns 430-38.

Water Quality

17. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the Mediterranean countries are enforcing EC directives on water quality at the same speed and in same way as in Britain; and if he will make a statement about cross-border enforcement.

Mr. Atkins: It is for the EC Commission to take the initiative to ensure implementation of directives and relevant international conventions to which the Community is signatory. The United Kingdom Government have continued to press for effective and consistent enforcement of directives, and the Commission now makes annual reports on implementation to the Environment Council.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *393*, what requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 concern product specifications for sewerage pipe.

Mr. Atkins: None: the 1989 regulations are concerned only with the quality of water delivered to the customer.

Countryside Commission

18. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessments he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of merging the Countryside Commission and English Nature.

Mr. Atkins: An announcement will be made once my right hon. Friend has had an opportunity to consider the report on the results of the merger study.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

20. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representatives he has received from British or foreign non-governmental organisations concerning the posing of environmental risks by the THORP.

Mr. Atkins: No representatives, but a number of representations have been received on this subject.

Local Government Reorganisation

21. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from hon. Members for Warwickshire constituencies about local government reorganisation in the county.

Mr. Curry: Since the announcement of the acceleration of the Local Government Commission's reviews on 30 September, Ministers in the Department have received the following letters from hon. Members in Warwickshire specifically on local government structure in the county:
Alan Howarth—5 November 1993 and 17 May 1994
Mike O'Brien—12 October 1993
James Pawsey—5 October 1993 and 31 May 1994
Sir Dudley Smith—15 October 1993

Nature Conservation Committee

22. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to discuss its annual budget.

Mr. Atkins: My predecessor, the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), met the chairman of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee last July to discuss a range of topics including the committee's priorities and budget. I will be holding a similar meeting with the Earl of Selborne before the summer recess.

Local Government Electors

23. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average number of electors per councillor in *(a)* metropolitan districts, *(b)* London boroughs and *(c)* shire districts, including county councillors.

Mr. Curry: The number of councillors on each council in England is not prescribed in primary legislation but has been determined, by order, for individual authorities on the basis of recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission.

The LGBC did however establish an average ratio of councillors to electorate to act as a guideline in drawing up its recommendations. The average number of electors per councillor used by the LGBC was:

	Number
Metropolitan districts	4,540
London Boroughs	4,530
Shire Counties	9,280
Shire districts	2,140

Local Government Review

25. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of consulting on and implementing the recommendations of the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn).

26. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the cost *(a)* to central Government and *(b)* to local government of the local government review.

Mr. Curry: The Local Government Commission incurred expenditure of £2·056 million in 1992-93 and received grant in aid of £5·124 million in 1993-94.

We do not have overall figures for the expenditure incurred indirectly by central Government, or directly by local authorities, on the local government review.

Air Quality

27. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new targets he proposes to set following the report in February by the expert panel on air quality standards and benzene.

Mr. Atkins: I hope to make a statement on future air quality standards for benzene in the autumn, when we have completed consideration of responses to our recent consultation paper, "Improving Air Quality".

31. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to announce new initiatives to improve air quality in British cities.

Mr. Atkins: We published wide-ranging consultation proposals on the further improvement of air quality in March. We will announce our conclusions on the next steps later in the year when we have considered responses to the consultation.

Beaches

28. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many British beaches now comply with EC pollution standards; and by what date he estimates all British beaches will do so.

Mr. Atkins: A total of 365 or 80 per cent. of United Kingdom bathing waters, complied with the relevant standards of the EC directive over the 1993 bathing season. The substantial programme of improvements to non-compliant waters is designed to bring virtually all the waters up to standard for the 1996 season.

Car Parking, Plymouth

29. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to investigate the use by Plymouth city council of its car parking revenue account.

Mr. Baldry: This is not a matter for the Government, and I have no such plans. If there are allegations of impropriety or illegality they should be referred to the independent auditor appointed to audit the city council's accounts.

Housing, Basildon

32. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the condition of the housing stock in Basildon.

Sir George Young: We are aware that there are problems of poor design and construction in some of Basildon's housing, in particular that built by the former new town development corporation. Very substantial resources are being invested in renovation or redevelopment, with help from the Estate Action and Housing Partnership programmes and under the terms of transfer of the new town housing.

Disabled People (Council Tax)

34. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about exemption from the council tax for disabled people.

Mr. Baldry: There is no exemption for disabled people from the council tax. However, people who are severely mentally impaired are not counted in the personal element of the tax and their presence will not add to the household's bill. Disabled persons may be entitled to a one band reduction in council tax if they need extra rooms or more space as a result of their special needs than would otherwise be the case.

Opencast Mining

35. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to reform planning law on opencast mining.

Mr. Baldry: Opencast coal mining is subject to the same planning law that applies to all mineral extraction. However, my Department has recently completed public consultation on draft revised planning guidelines for coal extraction and colliery spoil disposal which set tough environmental tests. New guidance will be published as soon as possible.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest available figures for levels of extraction of opencast coal.

Mr. Baldry: According to statistics compiled by the County Planning Officers' Society, 10·07 million tonnes of opencast coal were produced in England during the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993. The equivalent figures for Scotland and Wales are 5·4 million tonnes and 2·38 million tonnes.

Rough Sleepers

36. **Ms Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to deal with the special housing needs of those people sleeping in the Bullring at Waterloo.

Sir George Young: The Bullring at Waterloo is one of five areas specifically targeted under the Government's £180 million rough sleepers initiative in central London. A consortium of statutory and voluntary agencies, chaired by the London borough of Lambeth, is co-ordinating activity in the area. The Government are funding voluntary sector outreach and resettlement workers to assess the needs of the individuals sleeping rough in the Bullring and to assist them into suitable accommodation.

EC Directives

37. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which EC directives on environmental matters have yet to be fully incorporated into United Kingdom law.

Mr. Atkins: The main environmental directives still to be legally transposed in the United Kingdom are the nitrates directive, the urban waste water treatment directive and the habitats directive. The steps necessary to give effect to these are well in hand.

Single Regeneration Budget

38. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of unallocated funds for 1995-96 under the single regeneration budget.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 14 April 1994 at column *239*.

Local Government Commission

39. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Local Government Commission to evaluate the commission's work.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend last met Sir John Banham on 18 January. I met Sir John on 13 June.

National Parks

Mrs. Anne Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, when he will bring forward proposals to implement changes in the administration of national parks.

Mr. Atkins: The Local Government (Wales) Bill will allow my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales, to establish joint or special planning boards for the three national parks in Wales. However, it is our intention to introduce legislation to establish independent authorities for all 10 national parks in England and Wales as soon as there is a suitable opportunity to do so.

Water and Sewerage Companies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responsibilities the Director General of Ofwat has for monetary arrangements for the certification of products used by water and sewerage companies.

Mr. Atkins: None.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the 14th annual report from his Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee; and what response he plans to make to the recommendations made by Professor Knill's committee.

Mr. Atkins: The Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's 14th annual report was sent to my right hon. Friend on 17 June. We will respond to it in due course.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will request the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels to make available to hon. Members copies of the BNFL submissions to the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee on the matter of nuclear waste substitution options for foreign reprocessing waste arisings, since his deposition before Parliament on 25 June last year of his correspondence with the chairman of RWMAC on the matter.

Mr. Atkins: As we have not yet received the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's further advice on waste substitution, I am unable to consider this request.

Elderly People (Housing)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the final draft of the Ernst and Young study into the housing needs of the elderly; what was the final cost of the study; when the report will be placed in the Library; what conclusions he has drawn from the report; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My Department received a full set of interim reports on the 12 individual parts of the study in February 1994. We expect to publish a single report, summarising these findings, in the autumn. A copy will be placed in the Library.

I announced some interim findings from the research at a conference on affordable housing and community care organised by Hertfordshire county council earlier this year. A key finding is that the vast majority of elderly people wish to remain in their present homes, confirming the Government's community care policies. The study also suggests there is currently an over-provision of ordinary sheltered housing with warden support only, but under-provision of very sheltered housing with extra care facilities. We will consider carefully the policy implications of these and other findings from the study.

Following a competitive tender, the research contract was let to Ernst and Young and its sub-contractor, MORI, at a cost of £956,000.

European Structural Funds

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that appropriate technical assistance is made available for applications under objectives 2 and 5 (b) of European structural funds.

Mr. Baldry: Technical assistance grants are available only from within the United Kingdom's structural funds allocation. If any such grants are made, the amount left for projects is correspondingly smaller. Therefore, the Government consider that the funds should be used primarily for projects, and have sought to minimise the use of technical assistance.

Normal practice should be that applicants bear the cost of making applications themselves. This ensures equity between applicants and it is a sound principle that applicant bodies should pay for their own administration.

As in all other fields, Government Departments and offices will gladly assist those who may have difficulty in completing applications. However, it is recognised that there may be some organisations, especially in the voluntary sector, who may need extra help. Limited technical assistance may exceptionally be made available to support recognised bodies in bringing forward high quality applications.

Waste Management

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contracts for refuse collection, cleansing waste management and waste control have been awarded by local authorities to *(a)* UK Waste Management Ltd., *(b)* the FOCSA and *(c)* Leigh; and what is the total value in each case.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend does not require local authorities to inform him to whom contracts are awarded, unless such information is requested in connection with his responsibility for investigating potential breaches of the compulsory competitive tendering legislation. The Department does not therefore maintain a comprehensive record of either the number or value of contracts awarded to specific private sector contractors.

Homelessness

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is her estimate of the cost of providing public housing or other publicly-funded residential care for people who are homeless in England; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: In 1992-93 40 per cent. of new tenancies in local authority and housing association stock were allocated to households whom local authorities accepted as homeless under part III of the Housing Act 1985. Over the three years 1992-93 to 1994-95 the Government are spending £5½ billion on providing an estimated 179,000 housing association homes to meet a range of housing needs.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures he has for homelessness in 1992 and 1993; and what were the comparable figures at the most recent available date.

Sir George Young: The number of households accepted as homeless by local authorities in England in 1993 was an estimated 134,190, a reduction of some 8,700 —6·1 per cent.—on the corresponding figure in 1992 of 142,890 acceptances.

The latest available figures show a continuation of the downward trend with 131,790 acceptances in the year ending March 1994. This is the eighth successive quarter in which total acceptances in the preceding 12 months have fallen.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of resources his Department provides to housing associations for helping homeless people.

Sir George Young: My Department provides funding through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for housing associations to provide homes for homeless people and others in housing need. In 1994-95 the Housing Corporation's ADP budget is some £1·5 billion and the corporation estimates that this will enable housing associations to provide some 58,300 new lettings of which nearly 38,000—some 65 per cent—are intended by associations to be for homeless people. This would bring the total number of homes provided by housing associations between 1992-93 and 1994-95 to some 178,000. In addition the Department provides revenue support through the Housing Corporation for housing association schemes which provide accommodation for people with special needs, many of whom are single and homeless. In 1994-95 the corporation's revenue contributions are expected to be some £128 million.

Under the Government's six-year—1990-91 to 1995-96 —rough sleepers initiative, funding of £182 million has been made available to provide emergency shelters, night shelters, hostels, properties leased from private sector landlords and at least 3,300 bedspaces in permanent move-on accommodation for people who would otherwise sleep rough in central London. The bulk of this funding has been made available to housing associations through the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet housing associations and local authorities to co-ordinate a strategy for helping homeless people.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend hopes to announce shortly the Government's conclusions following consideration of the responses to our consultation paper "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies", which proposed a new approach to homelessness. We should then be happy to discuss our intentions with local authority and housing association representatives.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met housing associations to discuss homelessness.

Sir George Young: Ministers and officials in the Department are in frequent contact with the National

Federation of Housing Associations, and with individual housing associations, about a range of topics, including homelessness. My officials met representatives of the National Federation of Housing Associations on 6 June to discuss the Government's proposals to reform the homelessness legislation.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent figures he has for the numbers of people *(a)* living in hostels, *(b)* living in hotels provided at the expense of local authorities and *(c)* living in housing association dwellings.

Sir George Young: The latest available figures are for 31 March 1994 and these show that of the households for which local authorities in England had accepted responsibility to secure permanent accommodation, or who were awaiting the outcome of inquiries, some 10,670 households were living in hostels and 4,930 in bed-and-breakfast hotels.

The latest available information on housing association dwellings relates to 31 March 1993 when a total of 686,700 households were in occupation.

Housing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent requests for resources he has had *(a)* from housing associations and *(b)* from organisations such as Coventry Cyrenians.

Sir George Young: My Department has received no recent requests for resources from individual housing associations. The distribution of the resources made available to registered housing associations for the provision of social housing, through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme, is informed by the housing needs index and local authorities' priority housing needs.

My Department received 270 applications for grant under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 for 1994-95 from voluntary sector organisations, including two from Coventry Cyrenians for schemes to assist single people in housing need.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with other Departments about the impact of the EU habitats directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Government colleagues and I are collectively committed to the transposition of the directive into United Kingdom law. The draft implementing regulations are to be laid shortly. Government policy for achieving the aims of the directive in the United Kingdom is set out in the biodiversity action plan, published in January of this year. This sets out our strategy for nature conservation over the next 10 and 20 years.

Local Authority Leaseholds

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his proposals to tackle the problems faced by local authority leaseholders.

Sir George Young: I hope before the recess to lay an order introducing a scheme to help council leaseholders needing to move but unable to sell their flats bought under the right to buy because of mortgageability problems. Where leaseholders can buy a more suitable home from their local authority, the scheme will allow the council to take back the present flat in exchange, and to offset the right-to-buy price paid for it against the sale price of the exchange property. We will also be releasing shortly a discussion paper covering this and a number of other measures to help council leaseholders.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 21 June, *Official Report,* column *100,* what plans he has, apart from large-scale voluntary transfers, to introduce new initiatives or schemes designed to pass local authority housing stock to private sector interests; how many members of his or other Departments or offices are engaged in preparing policy papers on this matter; which of these options involve public subsidy; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Besides large scale voluntary transfer—LSVT—there are several ways in which local authority housing may be trasnferred to alternative landlords. Tenants are able to choose a new landlord under tenant's choice. Local authorities can transfer properties as they become vacant through trickle transfer; or with tenant agreement they can undertake a partial LSVT.

I am always keen to encourage local authorities to consider ways of increasing private investment in social housing. I answered the hon. Gentleman's question about staff numbers in my Department in my answer of 21 June. Officials in other Departments are involved as necessary. And, as I also said in my answer on 21 June, the Department is jointly funding a study with five urban authorities and the Housing Corporation to look into alternatives for the ownership and management of housing in urban and inner city areas. The study will consider the subsidy implications of these options, among other issues. It is due to report in the autumn.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Gummer: Publication of such reports will be considered on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the code of practice on open government.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the work force in each local authority area in South Yorkshire is in part-time employment.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

The latest estimate from the labour force survey is that in South Yorkshire in Winter 1993-94 (December 1993—February 1994), 27 per cent. of those in employment were working part-time.

Comparable information is not available for local authority areas.

EDUCATION

Under-fives Provision

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the reasons for the different levels of funding between local authorities for provision for the under-fives.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is for local authorities to determine their own priorities between and within services. The different levels of funding between local authorities on under-fives reflects those different priorities.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will allow local education authorities to spend more on the under-fives.

Mr. Robin Squire: Within general spending constraints, local authorities are free to determine their own expenditure on under-fives.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the criteria for establishing that a local education authority has underspent on the provision for the under-fives.

Mr. Robin Squire: A notional allowance for under-fives provision is made in each authority's education standard spending assessment, based on its resident under-fives population. How local authorities use that notional allowance is a matter for the discretion of each local authority. Neither education SSAs nor the sub-blocks within them are spending targets.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make it his policy to make the provision of funding for the under-fives dependent on the number of under-fives in school.

Mr. Robin Squire: The level and nature of provision for under-fives is a matter for the discretion of each local education authority. A notional allowance to support such provision is made in each authority's education standard spending assessment, based on its resident under-fives population. There are no current proposals to change the basis, although standard spending assessments are reviewed each year.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if it is his policy that the weighting factors in the standard spending assessments in respect of education are a reflection of his educational policies and priorities.

Mr. Robin Squire: No. Since education standard spending assessments are not prescriptive the weighting factors within them reflect the latest available objective information about relative variations in the cost incurred by local education authorities in providing a standard level of service.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the factors taken into account in setting the standard spending assessments for education spending.

Mr. Robin Squire: Each local education authority's standard spending assessment is calculated on the basis of its relevant pupil and population numbers, adjusted to allow for local variations in the cost of providing a standard level of service. Adjustments are made to reflect the additional local costs of provision for pupils with additional educational needs, provision of education in sparsely populated areas, free school meals and the high labour and other costs in London and the south east.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the policy adopted by his Department towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Forth: The Department considers publication of external consultants' reports on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the code of practice on access to government information. Factors taken into account include the need to protect private and sensitive commercial information relating to third parties.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Forth: Expenditure by the Department on consultancy fees in relation to market testing since September 1992 amounts to £296,210.

Teachers, Newham

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many teaching staff and non-teaching staff were employed by the Newham local education authority on *(a)* a full-time basis and *(b)* a part-time basis for each year since 1988.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff is collected from local education authorities by the local government management board on behalf of the joint staffing watch group. The following data was supplied by the Newham education authority and shows the numbers of teaching staff and other education staff employed for the years 1988 to 1994. It is not possible to separate these between staff employed in schools and those employed elsewhere.

	Teachers and lecturers		*Education—Other*	
March	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1988	2,697	338	1,146	1,866
1989	2,462	265	1,288	1,961
1990	2,500	677	1,404	1,218
1991	2,422	1,041	979	1,057
1992	2,342	575	994	1,026
1993	2,288	198	855	853
1994	2,043	157	805	867

Notes:

1. The table covers all staff in the LEA maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools, special and further education sectors and central administration. Staff employed by self-governing—GM—schools are not included. The 1994 figures exclude colleges which transferred to the new FE sector in April 1993.
2. "Education—other" includes educational support, clerical, school meals and premises related staff employed in schools and colleges, together with central services and administration within the education service.

Student Loans

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how frequently he meets the management of the body running the student loan scheme.

Mr. Boswell: On my right hon. Friend's behalf, I have met members of the board and management of the Student Loans Company on a number of occasions.

Mature Students

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students aged 50 years or over have enrolled on full-time higher education courses in each of the last five years.

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The numbers of United Kingdom domiciled new entrant higher education students in England aged 50 or over studying undergraduate courses for the past five years are set out in the table.

Year	*Number*
1988-89	1,184
1989-90	1,019
1990-91	1,321
1991-92	1,521
1992-93	2,440

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the procedure by which a young person under the age of 16 years would be issued with a national insurance number.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the issue of national insurance numbers is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 28 June 1994:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency I am responsible for answering questions about relevant operational matters. I have been asked to reply to your question about the procedure by which a young person under the age of 16 years would be issued with a National Insurance number (NINO).

The Agency has an automatic system which is designed to provide young people with details of their NINO before they reach age 16. The system uses the information held on the Department's Child Benefit computer records and most young people whose parents are in receipt of Child Benefit are identified when they are between the ages of 15 years 2 months and 15 years 8 months. Just before their 16th birthday a plastic NI number card containing details of their name and NINO is issued to the young person. If the parent or guardian has a different surname from the young person, they are asked to confirm the name which is to appear on the NI number card before it is issued.

As Child Benefit is not generally paid for young people in the care of local government authorities, an arrangement exists whereby the young person's social worker can ask for a NI number card to be issued. This voluntary agreement avoids the need for the young person to attend a social security office in person.

Special arrangements are also in place for children of Her Majesty's Forces personnel serving abroad. As the payment of Child Benefit is usually undertaken by the employing service/department no record of the young person is held on the Child Benefit computer record. The young person's boarding school or their parents can therefore complete a form asking for their NI number card to be issued. The form is passed to the Agency via the relevant unit paymaster. Anyone who does not receive NI number cards in one of these ways must apply, in person, to their local social security office for a NINO on or after their 16th birthday.

I hope that this information will prove useful.

Pensions Watchdog

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking in respect of proposals by the Institute of Chartered Accountants on the power of his proposed pensions watchdog; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: We welcome the institute's comments which have been taken into account in our proposals for a new occupational pensions regulatory authority, set out in the White Paper "Security, Equality, Choice: The Future for Pensions". We will be consulting further with the institute and other interested parties in developing the new regulatory framework for occupational pension schemes.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when his Department received the letter from the hon. Member for Ilford, South sent to him on 28 March concerning the length of time taken by the Child Support Agency to respond to representations from hon. Members; when he replied to it; when it was forwarded to the Child Support Agency; and when the chief executive of the Child Support Agency replied to it;

(2) when he will reply to the letter sent to him by the hon. Member for Ilford, South on 28 March;

(3) if he will publish the text of the reply dated 20 June from the chief executive of the Child Support Agency in response to the letter of 28 March from the hon. Member for Ilford, South to him.

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State received the letter on 31 March. As the letter concerned the operations of the Child Support Agency, it was transferred to the agency on 13 April for reply by the chief executive. I wrote to the hon. Member on 5 May to acknowledge receipt of his letter, and confirming the transfer of the letter to the chief executive. I understand that the chief executive replied on 20 June as follows:

"Thank you for your letter of 28 March to Peter Lilley who has asked me to reply. I am sorry for the delay in making my reply.

All letters from Members of Parliament addressed to me are acknowledged and I aim to respond within an average of 20 working days. Recent press interest has stimulated a great deal of correspondence from constituents and although that target is not being met at the moment, the necessary steps are being taken to ensure that correspondence from Members will be answered as soon as possible.

I hope my letter explains the posiition."

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the length of time taken by the Child Support Agency to reply to letters from hon. Members; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what guidelines have been issued to the Child Support Agency as to the time scale for replying to letters from hon. Members; and in what percentage of cases the Child Support Agency has met those guidelines.

Mr. Burt: The Child Support Agency has a target to reply in full to a letter from an hon. Member within an average of 20 working days.

I recognise that the target has been met only in some 13 per cent. of cases and unacceptable delays have occurred. The agency has taken a number of measures to improve performance in this area. These include additional staff resources and improved processing arrangements.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether it is his policy to refer all letters from hon. Members concerning delay in replying to letters by the Child Support Agency for reply by the Child Support Agency itself.

Mr. Burt: Ministers see all correspondence from hon. Members relating to social security matters. However, where queries relate to operational matters dealt with by executive agencies, including the Child Support Agency, Ministers may refer them to the appropriate chief executive to reply. The chief executive has responsibility for operational issues and it is for the authority to take remedial action where necessary.

Social Security Appeal Tribunal

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the grounds for the Benefits Agency to appeal against a decision of the social security appeal tribunal to the Social Security Commissioner; and how long, on average, this process takes from the date of the appeal tribunal's decision.

Mr. Burt: Appeals against a decision of a social security appeal tribunal are made by adjudication officers based at the central adjudication services. An appeal can be made only on the basis of a point of law. It is not possible to provide the information on how long this process takes as figures do not distinguish between appeals by adjudication officers and others.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long, on average, appeals to the social security appeal tribunal take to be heard from the date they are lodged.

Mr. Burt: The average length of time from lodgement of appeal to the date of hearing before a social security appeal tribunal in the quarter ending December 1993 was 28·4 weeks.

Income Support

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what mechanisms there are for providing temporary financial support to those engaged in the social security appeals procedure over their entitlement to income support.

Mr. Burt: Where it is thought a person is, or may be entitled to benefit, payments on account of that benefit may be made until the appeal has been decided. Possible hardship to the claimant would be considered where my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, is considering suspension of an appeal tribunal award whilst an appeal to the commissioner is awaiting hearing. Social fund crisis loans may also be available.

Vaccine-damaged Children

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of surviving children suffering from vaccine damage as defined by the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979; and how much each child has received under the Act.

Mr. Hague: Since follow-up records are not kept after a vaccine-damage payment has been made, no information is available as to the numbers of surviving vaccine-damaged children.

Black Postcards

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many black postcards were received at 10 Downing Street on and after 16 June.

Mr. Burt: Eight thousand, five hundred and fifteen postcards have been received since 16 June.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Hague: External consultants are engaged by the Department to support in-house teams in constructing their bids and to advise and support client side teams in devising contract strategies. Reports are therefore commercial in confidence and not for publication.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Year	*£*
1992-93	1,400,094
1993-94	4,261,909

Campaigns

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what limitations are placed on political campaigning by individuals employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 14 June 1994, columns 362-63]:* The information provided contained a typing error. The restrictions described in the second paragraph apply to higher executive officers (D), not higher executive officers.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Palestine

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on agreements made between the Palestinian water authority and the settler community about the fair use of water.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Gaza-Jericho agreement provides for the Palestinian authority to manage water, with the exception of that for settlements and military installations. This will continue to be managed by Merekoth Water Company, in accordance with existing quantities of drinking water and agricultural water. Israel and the Palestinians are also to establish a subcommittee to deal with this issue.

Hebron (International Presence)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the temporary international presence in Hebron; and whether the representatives have been given full co-operation by both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our Consulate-General in Jerusalem is in touch with the officer in charge of the temporary international presence in Hebron. It has built up a working relationship with both parties, including regular meetings.

Macedonia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what change there has been recently in the level of Serb military activity on the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and what has been the response of the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas-Hogg: We understand that the Yugoslav army has established an observation post in an area where the border between Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is not clearly defined. The United Nations does not regard this as a serious incident and has not alerted member states to any significant change in the pattern of military activity along the border between the two states. UNPROFOR continues to monitor the situation.

Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much in cash terms and constant prices the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on peace operations in developing countries, involving British military personnel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British military personnel were not involved in any peacekeeping operations in 1980.

The MOD costs for British military personnel participating in peacekeeping operations in developing countries for 1990, 1991 and 1992 were as follows—constant prices in brackets.

	1990	*1991 (£ million)*	*1992 (£ million)*
MINURSO		0·06	0·61
(Western Sahara)		(0·07)	(0·66)
UNIKOM		0·03	0·82
(Iraq/Kuwait)		(0·03)	(0·88)
UNAMIC/UNTAC		0·01	0·83
(Cambodia)		(0·01)	(0·89)
MFO Sinai	0·08	0·09	0·04
(Multinational Observer Force)	(0·09)	(0·10)	(0·04
Iraq:			
Safe Haven		11·25	
		(12·54)	
Warden		2·59	4·21
		(2·89)	(4·52)
Jural			5·28
			(5·67)
Total	0·08	14·03	11·79
	(0·09)	(15·64)	(12·66)

In addition, the United Kingdom assessed shares of the United Nations budgets for the peacekeeping operations were as follows:

	1991 (US$)	*1992 (US$)*
		Nil assessment (costs taken from existing
MINURSO	8,265,226	funds)
UNIKOM	3,542,240	3,651,915
UNAMIC/	—	2,010,720
UNTAC	—	48,813,331
Total	11,807,466	50,824,051

Note:—Cyprus and the former Yugoslavia have not been classified here as "developing countries".

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are required to lay their annual reports before Parliament;

(2) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to consult prior to legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish their response to advice supplied by them;

(3) if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to produce annual reports;

(4) if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to publish their advice to Government;

(5) if he will list the advisory bodies he has set up in his Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993";

(6) if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which have a statutory basis.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given by Her Majesty's Government to the request made on 6 June by the *Financial Times* to obtain details of decisions taken by qualified majority vote at the Foreign Affairs, Internal Market, Social Affairs and Agriculture Councils since 1989, submitted under the provisions of the EU code of conduct on public access to information.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The request by the *Financial Times* for information on voting records under the code of

conduct on access to documents is being considered by the Council. The United Kingdom is arguing that the response to the *Financial Times* should be as helpful as possible.

North Korea

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to respond to the letter on nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Trident submitted to him by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, Greenpeace and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on 15 June; and if he will place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I wrote to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent on 24 June in response to his letter of 15 June. A copy of my reply has been placed in the Library of the House.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent British commercial interests have been affected by ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley in Kenya; and what representations he has made on this matter.

Mr. Goodlad: Inter-ethnic fighting in Rift Valley province over the past two-and-a-half years has had limited effect on British commercial interests there. We have consistently made clear to the Kenyan Government over this period our concern at the political, economic and social dislocation caused by the fighting; and our view that it is the prime responsibility of every Government to provide security for their citizens, and to implement long term solutions.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Goodlad: The FCO's general policy is not to publish consultants' reports in relation to market testing but specific requests for information would be considered on merit in line with the Department's policy on open government.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Goodlad: The total costs are as follows:

	£
Financial year 1992-93	22,913
Financial year 1993-94	129,553
Total	152,466

Castlemartin Army Range

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the purpose of the destruction of British tanks and armoured cars at Castlemartin army range on 20 to 25 June.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A total of 37 tanks and 12 armoured combat vehicles were destroyed at the Castlemartin range in order to comply with the United Kingdom's obligations as a state party to the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty. The treaty, which all NATO and former Warsaw pact countries have ratified, is aimed at reducing the possibility of war in Europe and required signatories to reducing numbers of heavy weapons to much lower levels by the end of 1995. In total the United Kingdom is committed to destroying 183 tanks, 30 armoured combat vehicles and four combat helicopters. In comparison the Russian Federation, which has by far the largest reduction liability, will destroy over 3,000 tanks, 5,500 armoured cars, 660 pieces of artillery, 99 helicopters and more than 1,000 combat aircraft.

Arms Reduction

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress the former Warsaw pact countries are making in achieving the arms reduction targets set by the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the terms of the treaty, NATO and the countries of the former Warsaw pact have from July 1992 until November 1995 to meet their reduction obligations. To date over 20,000 items have been destroyed, 65 per cent. of them by the former Warsaw pact countries, including 4,409 tanks; 5,970 armoured vehicles; 25 helicopters; 713 combat aircraft; and 2,166 pieces of artillery. The total reduction liability of these countries is twice that of NATO countries—a reflection of the former Warsaw pact's larger holdings of weapons.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are being taken to ensure that former Warsaw pact countries are carrying out their obligations under the provisions of the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Monitoring of compliance with the treaty's provisions is carried out by international challenge inspections. It is NATO policy to witness all destruction events carried out by former Warsaw pact countries. For the United Kingdom, this is conducted by the joint arms control implementation group—JACIG. Since the reduction period began in 1992, JACIG has led 46 missions to reduction sites in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, where 67 per cent. of all destructions will take place. As a result of these and similar inspections carried out by other NATO countries we believe that all state parties are currently in compliance with their treaty obligations.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, following the European Court of Justice's Surinder Singh judgment in July 1992, he will refund fees to those persons who have been eligible for gratis visas had the European Court of Justice ruling existed at the time the fees were paid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. My Department will consider written applications for a refund of fees from those non-European Union nationals who paid a fee before July 1992 for the visa granted them to enter the United

Kingdom with their British citizen spouse who had been working in another member state of the European Union. The amount which may be refunded will be between £7 and £100 and be made up of the value of the fee plus an ex gratia sum in recognition of the time since the fee was paid. Applicants will be asked to provide evidence to support their claim.

Italy

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the new Italian Government about their decision to subsidise steel plants in Brescia.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have been asked to reply.

I met the Italian Minister for Industry, Senor Gnutti on 6 June and reiterated the concerns of the United Kingdom Government and steel industry about the proposed aid to the Bresciani. The proposal was discussed at the Industry Council on 22 June, as I reported in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) on 28 June, *Official Report*, column *467*.

WALES

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *866*, how many more nature conservation orders he has granted or refused under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in Wales; how many are still in force; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None. The two nature conservation orders reported in February are still in place.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 8 March, *Official Report*, column *153*, how many further prosecutions have been taken under sections 28 or 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None.

Assisted Area Grants

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many assisted area status grant applications from companies in Wales in each of the years since 1983 have translated into firm projects, with the numbers and amounts of the grants given and the number of jobs created; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The data are not available in the form requested. Information relating to regional assistance is published each year in the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual reports. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Employees

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each district council, county council and for Wales as a whole, for the latest available date, the average earnings of local government employees.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the earnings of employees in local government is available from the "New Earnings Survey", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

A55

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the provision of hard shoulder facilities on the A55 in Clwyd.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The A55 in Clwyd is an all-purpose dual two-lane trunk road which is not normally provided with hard shoulders. The operational characteristics of all trunk roads are kept under review and improvements are made only when justified.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the emergency telephone provision on the A55 in Clwyd.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The emergency telephone assessment undertaken by the highways directorate of the Welsh Office highlighted the requirement for 19 emergency telephones on trunk roads within Clwyd. Ten of these are on the A55 and they will be the first to be installed under phase 1 of the contract, commencing in August 1994.

The remaining nine installations will be undertaken during subsequent phases of the contract.

Public Bodies

Mr. Rod Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make available the recommendations of the efficiency scrutiny of the sponsorship of non-departmental public bodies in Wales, and his response to them.

Mr. Redwood: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the report's recommendations and my response, in the form of an action plan for their implementation.

Roads

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimate he has made of the number of jobs currently created on road schemes in the Merthyr borough and Rhymney district; and how many of these are local employees;

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created by his Department's current road schemes within each county of Wales; and what is his estimate of the number of Welsh employees on those schemes.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not available.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Creation and Training Programmes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research he has commissioned examining the outcome and effectiveness in terms of jobs gained and qualifications awarded of each job creation and training programme run by his Department since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Regular surveys have been carried out in connection with the main employment and training

programmes run by my Department since 1979. These have provided information on the number of participants who have found jobs since leaving the programme and, where appropriate, on the numbers who have achieved a qualification. More detailed research has been carried out periodically to compare employment rates amongst ex-participants with those amongst a group of non-participants. The results of the current regular surveys for training for work and youth training are published each month in the *Employment Gazette*.

Television and Radio

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people there are employed in television and radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom; and how many of these are employed directly or indirectly by the BBC.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest reliable information is from the 1991 census of employment. The most detailed data available covers radio and television services and theatres—code 9741 from the 1980 standard industrial classification. In September 1991, there were 75,800 jobs in this activity in the United Kingdom.

The Statistics of Trade Act 1947 prohibits the disclosure of information about individual employers. I cannot, therefore provide the information requested about the BBC.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with his colleagues on increasing the funding of TECs.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has discussed the funding of training and enterprise councils with Cabinet colleagues in the course of negotiations for the public expenditure survey.

The amount of funding TECs will receive in 1995-96 will be announced following my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's unified Budget statement.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the policy adopted by his Department towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Consultants offer advice on operational aspects of market testing. This is commercially sensitive and is not published.

TREASURY

Government Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table indicating how much central Government expenditure was spent in *(a)* England, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales for the most recent available year, both in total money terms and on expenditure per capita.

Mr. Portillo: The table shows central Government expenditure which can be identified from official records as having been incurred on behalf of the population of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The information given is consistent with that published in tables 7.6 A and B of "Public Expenditure, Statistical Supplement to the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1994-95" (Cm 2519).

Central Government expenditure, 1992-93

£ million

	Cash	*Per capita*
England	104,678	2,171
Scotland	13,448	2,633
Wales	7,369	2,549
Northern Ireland	7,135	4,475
United Kingdom	132,630	2,295

Barclays Bank

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement following the United States Supreme Court decision on Barclays bank.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. and learned Friend and I were naturally disappointed by the Supreme Court's decision on the Barclays case. The Government have always strongly opposed the imposition of world-wide unitary tax on United Kingdom-owned companies and supported Barclays throughout this litigation.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said last September, the legislation passed by California to modify its tax law is a major step forward and it should ensure that in future no United Kingdom-owned company is exposed to damage there from the imposition of world-wide unitary tax. We will be following closely the detailed regulations and the practical implementation of this law. I share the concerns of British business that the details of the Californian legislation have not yet been fully implemented. Consequently, the United Kingdom will retain its retaliatory powers against the possibility that states might damage United Kingdom-owned companies at some time in the future.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I also welcome the clear commitment to the internationally accepted arm's-length principle which has been shown by the Federal Administration. We regard such support for the international consensus as of major importance in expanding trade and investment throughout the world.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and (i) Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Nelson: The following table gives the total value and number of contracts let by HM Treasury for 1991-92 and 1992-93 for the subject headings and companies requested. In this period no contracts were awarded to

Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, Robson Rhodes and Pannell Kerr Forster. I regret information going back beyond this date can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The table is not specifically broken down by company, as information given to this detail would breach our commercial-in-confidence rules.

Contracts let with the following companies: Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG Peat Marwick, Ernst and Young, Price Waterhouse and Touche Ross, during 1991-92 and 1992-93 were as follows:

Subject	1991-92		1992-93	
	Number of contracts	Value (£ thousand)	Number of contracts	Value (£ thousand)
Privatisation	3	1,184	6	277
Market-testing	1	23	1	20
Management advice	—	—	—	—
Accounting	—	—	—	—
Audit	—	—	4	137
Consultancy	1	20	—	—
Other services	—	—	3	119

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his involvement with TECs.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. and learned Friend has no direct involvement with TECs. That is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Employment.

VAT Office, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what amount, above projected costs, it has cost to construct the value added tax office in Liverpool; what occupancy was originally planned for the building; how many staff are actually based there; how many and which staff commute from London to work in the office; who pays their travel costs; what is the total; how long they have been sustained; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: In October 1990 independent quantity surveyors estimated the construction costs of the VAT headquarters building in Liverpool at £25·1 million. The estimate was based on a sketch design and was at October 1990 prices. This price excludes land, professional fees, fixtures and fittings, furniture and VAT.

The main part of the final account for the construction has not yet been agreed by the contractor but the Department's project cost control quantity surveyors have prepared draft final accounts and advise that the construction costs will be within the estimate. Exact figures cannot, at this stage, be given for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

The planned occupancy specified in the building brief prepared by Customs and Excise was 1,775.

Currently there are 752 staff based in the building. A further 39 posts are scheduled to be relocated from Southend by December 1994, but much of the work involved will be absorbed by existing staff who would otherwise be surplus. Four hundred and ninety Customs regional HQ and operational staff will move into the building in September 1994. This creates a need to provide space for facilities for public callers, VAT traders and shipping agents from September 1994.

The space not required by Customs has been re-allocated to the Charity Commission by Property Holdings, the managers of the Government's estate. The Charity Commission intends to move 236 staff into the building in November 1994. There are no staff who commute from London to work in the office.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Nelson: Reports by external consultants in relation to market testing constitute advice to the management of the Department and are not published.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Nelson: Expenditure by Her Majesty's Treasury to date on fees to external consultants for work related to market testing amounts to £136,461.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the Government's objective in raising the real exchange rate against the ecu above the February 1993 level; and what assessment he has made of the effect this has had on *(a)* the profitability of manufacturing in the United Kingdom and *(b)* exports of manufactures to the EEC;

(2) what was the nominal exchange rate against the ecu in *(a)* August 1992, *(b)* February 1993 and *(c)* June 1994;

(3) what was the percentage increase in the nominal exchange rate against the ecu between February 1993 and January 1994; and what is his estimate of the effect of the increase on the volume of *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports of manufactures to the EC.

(4) what account the Government's policy on the rate of exchange against the ecu takes of the United Kingdom share of the market for manufactures in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the EC.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 21 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *15*, which provides a reference to data which can be used to calculate the sterling exchange rates and percentage change requested.

In the same answer I also made a statement about the role of the exchange rate in monetary policy. The Government have no objective to raise sterling's real exchange rate against the ecu.

The exchange rate is only one factor affecting the volume of imports and exports. It is difficult to isolate the effect of changes in the exchange rate from that of other factors, such as relative prices and activity in the United Kingdom and its trading partners.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy on the rate of exchange of the pound sterling against the deutschmark.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 21 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *15*.

HEALTH

Prednisone

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific guidelines and advice there are for patients concerning the prescription and the possible side effects of the synthetic corticosteroid Prednisone.

Mr. Sackville: It is important that patients taking corticosteroids do not abruptly stop taking the drug, as this may have serious consequences. This advice is provided to patients through steroid treatment cards which give clear guidance on the precautions to be taken. They also provide details of the prescriber, drug, dosage and duration of treatment. Steroid treatment cards are routinely given to patients taking systemic corticosteroids.

Information and advice on possible side effects are also available in patient information leaflets. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 2 December, *Official Report*, column *702*. However, in the light of the recent recommendations of the Committee on Safety of Medicines regarding severe chickenpox in association with corticosteroids, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 12 May, *Official Report*, columns 216-17, product information for corticosteroids is being revised. All pharmaceutical companies manufacturing systemically administered corticosteroids have been approached and asked to revise or introduce patient information leaflets without waiting until renewal of the product licences.

Accidental Overdosing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of accidental overdosing of prescribed medication were reported in 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested.

Evening Primrose Oil

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has funded into the efficacy of evening primrose oil as a treatment for arthritis; in what circumstances evening primrose oil is available on prescription; if her Department intends to fund further research into the value of evening primrose oil for treatment of illness and disease; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC is always willing to consider soundly-based scientific proposals for research. Evening primrose oil is not available on prescription under the national health service.

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to devise a new national formula for allocating finance to district health authorities for hospital and community health services.

Mr. Sackville: A review of the weighted capitation formula is taking place.

Organophosphorus Insecticides

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations and research her Department is carrying out in respect of organophosphorous chemicals used in sheep dips, and those used as insecticides that were sprayed on the British armed forces during the Gulf war; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None. However, the Health and Safety Executive, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, has two on-going research projects involving organophosphorus sheep dips.

The Government receive independent scientific advice on the safety in use of sheep dips containing organophosphorus and other compounds from the Statutory Veterinary Products Committee. Following a review last year of the result of research they advised that organophosphorus sheep dips could continue to be marketed. In particular, they found no firm scientific evidence to support the association of chronic ill-health with exposure. Nevertheless, they recommended measures to reduce exposure to the dips and that further investigations be undertaken.

Earlier this year, the medical and scientific panel was set up as a sub-committee of the Veterinary Products Committee to evaluate current research, advise on additional work, advise on the suitability of projects submitted, and to report to the Veterinary Products Committee.

The medical effects of a large over-exposure to organophosphorus insecticides or sheep dips are well documented. Large over-exposures should not occur when the recommended precautions are taken.

The suggestion that organophosphorus insecticides were sprayed on the British armed forces during the Gulf War is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost to date of maintaining the premises formerly occupied by the Dreadnought seamen's hospital in Greenwich, since they became vacant.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for South Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. William Wells, the chairman of the authority, for details.

Health Needs

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration will be given in the future, for the Croydon health authority district, to health needs as reflected by *(a)* infant mortality, *(b)* life expectancy at birth, *(c)* the number and proportion of single unmarried mothers and *(d)* the needs of ethnic minority communities.

Mr. Sackville: Croydon health authority, like all health authorities, is expected to plan to meet the health needs of all its residents. The hon. Member may wish to contact Adrienne Fresko, chairman of Croydon health authority, for details.

New Hospital Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effects of capital financing charges on the ability of health care providers to invest in new hospital buildings.

Mr. Sackville: The purpose of the capital charging system is to increase the awareness of health service managers of the cost of capital, to ensure that proposals for capital investment make best use of the resources available and to encourage both health care providers and purchasers to be innovative in planning health care delivery by considering alternatives to capital investment where appropriate. This has led to some providers reconsidering plans for new hospital buildings. There is no evidence that necessary capital investment is being constrained by the capital charging system.

Allergic Reactions to Medication

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of death caused by an allergic reaction to prescribed medication were reported in 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Cause of death data are not yet available for 1993.

Private Patients

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment she has made of whether, where NHS hospitals provide private treatment to patients, there is cross subsidy from NHS to private patients;

(2) what assessment she has made of whether, where NHS hospitals offer private treatment to patients, the treatment is at full cost which includes overhead depreciation and profit.

Mr. Sackville: Health authorities and national health service trusts are already aware that they are expected to calculate NHS private patient charges on a commercial basis. Such charges must not be less than the full cost to the health authority or NHS trust including overheads and capital charges and must not involve any cross subsidy from NHS to private patients. This generates valuable income for improving services for all patients.

Aortic Aneurysms

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were attributed to aortic aneurysms in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement on the plans she has for screening programmes for this condition.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows deaths from aortic aneurysms in England and Wales for the last five years for which such figures are available.

	Number
1988	7,914
1989	8,251
1990	8,463
1991	8,703
1992	8,992

Figures supplied by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys.

The Department is interested in supporting research into the potential usefulness of screening for aortic aneurysm. It has been funding a pilot research project in the subject.

Gamma Hydroxy Butyrate

Mr Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effects of gamma hydroxy butyrate *(a)* when taken by people who have not been prescribed it and it and *(b)* when taken in quantity; what controls exist at present; and what controls she now intends to introduce on the availability of gamma hydroxy butyrate (i) other than by prescription and (ii) by mail order.

Mr. Sackville: The substance known as gamma hydroxy butyrate has anaesthetic and muscle relaxant properties and is regarded as a medicinal product as defined in section 130 of the Medicines Act 1968. It can have serious adverse effects, among which are: vomiting, drowsiness, vertigo, depressed breathing and heart rate.

Licences are required under the Medicines Act 1968 for the manufacture, sale or supply of this product. No such licences have been granted. Any person manufacturing, selling or supplying an unlicensed product is likely to be in breach of the Act and committing a criminal offence. Any breach of the Act is investigated by enforcement officers of the Medicines Control Agency. The existing controls in the Medicines Act are at present regarded as sufficient.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Sackville: The decision to disclose all or part of the information contained in external consultants' reports will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by her Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Sackville: Since publication of the White Paper, "Competing for Quality", in November 1991, the total cost of consultants employed in connection with market testing programmes of the Department and its agencies is as follows:

	£
April 1991 to March 1992	30,000
April 1992 to March 1993	370,000
April 1993 to March 1994 (latest figures held)	580,000

Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from registered nurses, midwives and health visitors in relation to the registrar of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Mr. Sackville: None.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *417*, regarding loans to national health service trusts, if she will itemise which trusts received loans or guarantees, and for what amount.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The information requested will be placed in the Library. The information is provided in tabular form and corrects that given on 17 May.

Trusts borrow principally to support their capital investment activities and all the borrowing detailed was within agreed limits whether or not the trust met its financial duties. Trusts also negotiate overdraft facilities with their bankers and the Department issues guarantees in support of these arrangements.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Homes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the plans of Scottish Homes to dispose of its landlord responsibility over housing stock with particular reference to Paisley, South;

(2) when he last met the chairman of Scottish Homes to discuss the disposal of housing stock; what plans there are to dispose of high-rise property owned by Scottish Homes in the Paisley, South constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the chairman of Scottish Homes to discuss the disposal of its housing stock but he has issued guidance to Scottish Homes on this matter, following which it published procedures for the disposal of its stock.

In accordance with these procedures, Scottish Homes is preparing a local stock strategy in consultation with tenants and other interested parties, which will outline a time scale and provide a clear framework for the transfer of its stock, including high rise property, in the Renfrew district, which covers the Paisley, South constituency. It is expected that the strategy document will be published during July. Proposals to transfer must have the agreement of tenants after which they are subject to my right hon. Friend's approval.

Landlords (Neglect of Property)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statutory and discretionary powers are available to local authorities to take action against owner-occupiers and private landlords who fail to keep their property in reasonable sanitary condition; what special powers are available when the condition of the property or grounds of the property deteriorate into a state which is likely to cause nuisance to neighbours, damage to adjacent property or is a potential threat to an otherwise safe and healthy environment; if he has any plans to bring forward measures to tighten control of such situations; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities may take action under the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897, the Building (Scotland) Act 1959, the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 to require the repair or up-grading of homes so that, for example, they have adequate sanitation. Powers relating to houses in multiple occupation are also contained in the 1987 Act. Specific powers are available for authorities to take action where neighbours are affected and there is provision to require the maintenance of private open spaces. There are no plans to amend those wide-ranging powers.

Defective Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given local authorities, housing associations and Scottish Homes on dealing with the structural defects of Orlit and Whitson-Fairhurst type houses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such advice has been given by my Department. However, information about approved repair schemes for defective house types is available from PRC Homes Ltd. A different scheme is required for each house type and, for some types, repair is either impractical or is not cost-effective. There is no approved repair scheme for the Whitson-Fairhurst and Orlit house types in Scotland. Where such a scheme does not exist, the defect cannot be dealt with, although in many cases the houses will continue to provide satisfactory accommodation for many years yet.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to bring forward additional measures to facilitate and assist local authorities, Scottish Homes, housing associations, co-operatives and owner-occupiers to deal with the structural defects of Orlit and Whitsun-Fairhurst type houses.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: No further measures are necessary. Local authorities and other housing agencies have been informed about defective house types, such as the Orlit and Whitson-Fairhurst, and how they may be dealt with. Resources totalling almost £426 million have been made available to local authorities for capital investment in public sector housing in 1994-95 and they are able to undertake work on defective housing in their own stock if they consider this to be a priority. Scottish Homes can also make similar provision. Local authorities who assist private owners eligible for repurchase of their home or reinstatement grant are given additional capital allocations which fully reflect the cost of that assistance.

Renfrew District Council

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing what the value of housing support grant to Renfrew district council would have been in each year since 1981, using the formulae applied in 1980-81 as a calculation index and uprating for

inflation; what was actually paid to each local authority in each year of the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The housing support grant entitlement of any individual local authority is the product of a complex series of calculations to determine the difference between estimated aggregate eligible expenditure and estimated aggregate relevant income for all appropriate local authorities and its apportionment among authorities on the basis of distribution formulae agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

A re-calculation of the housing support grant entitlements of Renfrew district council since 1981 on the basis of the formulae which applied to the 1980-81 grant settlement could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

The actual grant entitlements of individual local authorities since 1980-81 are shown in the table. Over the period, it has been the Government's policy to move away from indiscriminate housing subsidies, such as housing support grant, in favour of targeting assistance on tenants in greatest need through the housing benefit system.

Individual entitlements to Housing Support Grant

Authority	*1980-81*
Berwickshire	1,306,875
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,753,749
Roxburgh	1,971,598
Tweeddale	285,768
Clackmannan	1,818,745
Falkirk	7,479,143
Stirling	1,916,151
Annandale and Eskdale	1,452,108
Nithsdale	905,200
Stewartry	676,321
Wigtown	1,154,830
Dunfermline	6,079,270
Kirkcaldy	6,500,216
North East Fife	1,664,141
Aberdeen	10,733,105
Banff and Buchan	5,495,862
Gordon	2,860,784
Kincardine and Deeside	1,373,533
Moray	4,402,062
Badenoch and Strathspey	470,225
Caithness	1,044,456
Inverness	2,323,484
Lochaber	1,825,267
Nairn	351,660
Ross and Cromarty	4,249,933
Skye and Lochalsh	343,792
Sutherland	729,163
East Lothian	5,062,507
Edinburgh	12,517,913
Midlothian	3,334,405
West Lothian	4,796,099
Argyll and Bute	3,565,946
Bearsden and Milngavie	458,385
Clydebank	4,032,786
Clydesdale	1,651,898
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	670,398
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1,812,670
Cunninghame	4,656,897
Dumbarton	2,805,151
East Kilbride	340,284
Eastwood	303,824
Glasgow	49,487,984
Hamilton	5,015,434
Inverclyde	6,140,965
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4,168,590
Kyle and Carrick	4,351,786
Monklands	4,359,605
Motherwell	8,193,225
Renfrew	6,571,032
Strathkelvin	2,401,186
Angus	4,372,617
Dundee	8,602,017
Perth and Kinross	3,118,176
Orkney	1,103,278
Shetland	1,889,843
Western Isles	1,247,658

Authority	*1981-82*
Berwickshire	1,038,356
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,154,679
Roxburgh	1,537,295
Tweeddale	109,055
Clackmannan	1,283,981
Falkirk	4,428,554
Stirling	1,016,562
Annandale and Eskdale	1,272,965
Nithsdale	100
Stewartry	542,539
Wigtown	767,726
Dunfermline	2,800,067
Kirkcaldy	3,077,166
North East Fife	979,538
Aberdeen	9,533,966
Banff and Buchan	4,343,622
Gordon	2,379,107
Kincardine and Deeside	933,388
Moray	3,552,254
Badenoch and Strathspey	435,542
Caithness	876,132
Inverness	1,631,231
Lochaber	1,813,360
Nairn	251,993
Ross and Cromarty	4,199,542
Skye and Lochalsh	316,747
Sutherland	519,316
East Lothian	3,155,554
Edinburgh	7,869,440
Midlothian	1,791,607
West Lothian	2,182,016
Argyll and Bute	2,811,692
Bearsden and Milngavie	193,589
Clydebank	3,285,203
Clydesdale	578,477
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	117,762
Cumnock and Doon Valley	819,727
Cunninghame	2,744,500
Dumbarton	1,177,708
East Kilbride	98,060
Eastwood	15,462
Glasgow	44,099,691
Hamilton	3,243,635
Inverclyde	4,443,201
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	1,885,952
Kyle and Carrick	2,807,798
Monklands	4,252,050
Motherwell	5,737,727
Renfrew	2,186,158
Strathkelvin	1,539,073
Angus	2,499,757
Dundee	5,285,879
Perth and Kinross	1,309,294
Orkney	1,082,222
Shetland	2,624,591
Western Isles	1,267,392

Authority	*1982-83*
Berwickshire	686,226
Ettrick and Lauderdale	552,583
Roxburgh	1,165,695
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	689,627
Falkirk	1,494,309

Authority	1982-83
Stirling	1,335,195
Annandale and Eskdale	1,387,048
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	412,797
Wigtown	452,325
Dunfermline	683,115
Kirkcaldy	696,26[illegible]
North East Fife	829,197
Aberdeen	7,089,761
Banff and Buchan	3,306,069
Gordon	2,240,622
Kincardine and Deeside	817,907
Moray	2,301,798
Badenoch and Strathspey	505,386
Caithness	817,378
Inverness	1,375,208
Lochaber	1,383,564
Nairn	206,063
Ross and Cromarty	3,493,364
Skye and Lochalsh	316,309
Sutherland	477,942
East Lothian	2,079,858
Edinburgh	2,327,904
Midlothian	906,746
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	2,767,417
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	2,201,808
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	167,191
Cunninghame	745,237
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	37,292,928
Hamilton	1,543,988
Inverclyde	3,048,261
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	298,335
Kyle and Carrick	911,439
Monklands	3,222,528
Motherwell	3,296,551
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	1,198,935
Angus	1,221,795
Dundee	1,820,168
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	852,422
Shetland	2,654,652
Western Isles	1,358,959

Authority	1983-84
Berwickshire	648,884
Ettrick and Lauderdale	373,420
Roxburgh	1,260,321
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	45,021
Falkirk	0
Stirling	20,431
Annandale and Eskdale	1,574,069
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	414,643
Wigtown	255,317
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	309,583
Aberdeen	3,724,702
Banff and Buchan	2,437,206
Gordon	1,709,877
Kincardine and Deeside	972,194
Moray	1,987,151
Badenoch and Strathspey	515,570
Caithness	819,544
Inverness	1,241,308
Lochaber	1,334,449

Authority	1983-84
Nairn	265,393
Ross and Cromarty	3,091,946
Skye and Lochalsh	323,325
Sutherland	446,107
East Lothian	1,050,527
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	2,554,514
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	1,855,408
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	32,355,851
Hamilton	119,816
Inverclyde	1,865,250
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	447,952
Monklands	1,705,278
Motherwell	1,037,418
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	326,922
Angus	181,321
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	731,864
Shetland	2,409,052
Western Isles	1,723,845

Authority	1984-85
Berwickshire	486,805
Ettrick and Lauderdale	107,262
Roxburgh	1,265,786
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,673,013
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	359,095
Wigtown	200,315
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	87,427
Aberdeen	3,053,523
Banff and Buchan	1,943,394
Gordon	1,940,317
Kincardine and Deeside	854,852
Moray	1,790,081
Badenoch and Strathspey	487,297
Caithness	826,248
Inverness	1,305,145
Lochaber	1,225,816
Nairn	227,117
Ross and Cromarty	3,241,650
Skye and Lochalsh	394,993
Sutherland	467,987
East Lothian	392,369
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	2,308,945
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	1,774,590
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0

Authority	1984-85
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	32,269,404
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	1,162,804
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	1,196,032
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	2,775
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	779,233
Shetland	2,764,219
Western Isles	1,863,547

Authority	1985-86
Berwickshire	446,429
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	1,306,156
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,759,500
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	343,400
Wigtown	95,565
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	2,260,303
Banff and Buchan	1,599,685
Gordon	1,800,235
Kincardine and Deeside	942,305
Moray	1,509,258
Badenoch and Strathspey	497,879
Caithness	750,997
Inverness	1,510,450
Lochaber	1,398,166
Nairn	218,689
Ross and Cromarty	3,474,516
Skye and Lochalsh	467,318
Sutherland	518,431
East Lothian	23,235
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	2,155,278
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	1,778,773
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	32,675,646
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	562,537
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	328,169
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	804,942
Shetland	2,778,672
Western Isles	2,171,685

Authority	1986-87
Berwickshire	201,135
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	951,730
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,382,490
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	253,704
Wigtown	0
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	558,241
Gordon	1,838,802
Kincardine and Deeside	779,199
Moray	682,537
Badenoch and Strathspey	388,218
Caithness	663,077
Inverness	1,033,853
Lochaber	1,441,327
Nairn	181,633
Ross and Cromarty	3,178,298
Skye and Lochalsh	586,754
Sutherland	522,874
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	1,373,972
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	804,237
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	21,891,239
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	684,343
Shetland	2,934,933
Western Isles	2,137,164

Authority	1987-88
Berwickshire	225,306
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	1,115,301
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,337,917
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	386,158
Wigtown	265,382
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	617,681

Authority	1987-88
Gordon	2,723,337
Kincardine and Deeside	1,267,315
Moray	982,346
Badenoch and Strathspey	462,702
Caithness	759,297
Inverness	1,157,218
Lochaber	1,396,801
Nairn	209,500
Ross and Cromarty	3,339,315
Skye and Lochalsh	789,606
Sutherland	643,801
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	1,709,251
Bearsden and Milngavie	51,224
Clydebank	786,456
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	63,514
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	15,116,893
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	743,450
Shetland	3,172,405
Western Isles	2,595,347

Authority	1988-89
Berwickshire	91,417
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	1,124,908
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,557,353
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	413,062
Wigtown	410,486
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	246,862
Gordon	3,276,799
Kincardine and Deeside	1,617,844
Moray	614,211
Badenoch and Strathspey	384,299
Caithness	1,012,850
Inverness	1,370,584
Lochaber	1,800,599
Nairn	274,618
Ross and Cromarty	3,793,708
Skye and Lochalsh	985,932
Sutherland	796,808
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	1,586,284
Bearsden and Milngavie	124,971

Authority	1988-89
Clydebank	1,031,201
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	33,496
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	24,660,513
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	850,377
Shetland	3,677,667
Western Isles	2,894,620

Authority	1989-90
Berwickshire	48,841
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	1,339,141
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,684,048
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	509,240
Wigtown	551,246
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	136,883
Gordon	3,788,264
Kincardine and Deeside	1,922,521
Moray	528,935
Badenoch and Strathspey	393,499
Caithness	1,229,421
Inverness	1,949,824
Lochaber	2,148,759
Nairn	344,628
Ross and Cromarty	4,154,244
Skye and Lochalsh	1,203,495
Sutherland	969,864
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	1,775,900
Bearsden and Milngavie	278,995
Clydebank	1,010,546
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	30,697,621
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	0

Authority	1989-90
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	776,917
Shetland	4,112,702
Western Isles	3,741,152

Authority	1990-91
Berwickshire	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	1,321,472
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	0
Stirling	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,504,110
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	436,944
Wigtown	600,795
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	0
Gordon	3,792,482
Kincardine and Deeside	1,882,382
Moray	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	386,736
Caithness	1,330,831
Inverness	1,934,977
Lochaber	2,398,530
Nairn	350,804
Ross and Cromarty	4,231,891
Skye and Lochalsh	1,303,836
Sutherland	1,006,044
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	0
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	1,041,664
Bearsden and Milngavie	317,125
Clydebank	650,646
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	0
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	0
Eastwood	0
Glasgow	24,536,123
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	0
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Orkney	783,399
Shetland	4,395,805
Western Isles	3,757,098

Authority	1991-92
Berwickshire	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	1,139,087
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	91,878
Stirling	132,696

Authority	1991-92
Annandale and Eskdale	1,288,127
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	175,842
Wigtown	455,431
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	0
Gordon	3,808,288
Kincardine and Deeside	1,828,221
Moray	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	330,314
Caithness	1,249,076
Inverness	1,657,779
Lochaber	2,463,394
Nairn	306,917
Ross and Cromarty	4,159,560
Skye and Lochalsh	1,343,234
Sutherland	992,735
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	526,144
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	618,210
Bearsden and Milngavie	301,748
Clydebank	438,557
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	7,774
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	61,626
Eastwood	8,108
Glasgow	22,687,417
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	153,317
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	2,382
Kyle and Carrick	0
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	28,488
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	29,303
Orkney	639,138
Shetland	4,603,666
Western Isles	3,907,490

Authority	1992-93
Berwickshire	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	726,723
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	123,120
Stirling	116,455
Annandale and Eskdale	1,151,985
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	208,499
Wigtown	360,746
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	0
Gordon	3,598,836
Kincardine and Deeside	1,587,282
Moray	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	326,070
Caithness	1,161,797
Inverness	1,299,935
Lochaber	2,315,434
Nairn	246,839

Authority	1992-93
Ross and Cromarty	4,060,836
Skye and Lochalsh	1,339,757
Sutherland	853,085
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	535,752
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	315,749
Bearsden and Milngavie	73,749
Clydebank	150,464
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	10,760
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	100,892
Eastwood	11,583
Glasgow	17,400,837
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	169,044
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	15,273
Kyle and Carrick	6,720
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	36,735
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	27,462
Orkney	359,131
Shetland	4,592,216
Western Isles	4,186,649

Authority	1993-94
Berwickshire	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	204,134
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	154,770
Stirling	137,399
Annandale and Eskdale	686,273
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	80,855
Wigtown	0
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	0
Aberdeen	0
Banff and Buchan	0
Gordon	2,982,207
Kincardine and Deeside	1,460,318
Moray	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	242,217
Caithness	790,443
Inverness	436,489
Lochaber	2,028,174
Nairn	223,819
Ross and Cromarty	3,777,488
Skye and Lochalsh	1,305,608
Sutherland	758,411
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	512,148
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	51,203
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	0
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	22,996
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	91,443
Eastwood	12,449

Authority	1993-94
Glasgow	11,103,999
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	157,531
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	16,954
Kyle and Carrick	58,711
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	33,768
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	47,026
Orkney	266,699
Shetland	4,249,266
Western Isles	3,959,316

Authority	1994-95
Berwickshire	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0
Roxburgh	0
Tweeddale	0
Clackmannan	0
Falkirk	157,459
Stirling	172,810
Annandale and Eskdale	532,875
Nithsdale	0
Stewartry	0
Wigtown	0
Dunfermline	0
Kirkcaldy	0
North East Fife	63,731
Aberdeen	34,676
Banff and Buchan	0
Gordon	2,838,437
Kincardine and Deeside	935,054
Moray	36,735
Badenoch and Strathspey	175,155
Caithness	461,494
Inverness	55,629
Lochaber	2,042,337
Nairn	116,909
Ross and Cromarty	3,678,043
Skye and Lochalsh	1,297,404
Sutherland	683,292
East Lothian	0
Edinburgh	552,583
Midlothian	0
West Lothian	0
Argyll and Bute	78,175
Bearsden and Milngavie	0
Clydebank	0
Clydesdale	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0
Cunninghame	33,688
Dumbarton	0
East Kilbride	136,710
Eastwood	36,763
Glasgow	1,681,240
Hamilton	0
Inverclyde	165,384
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	32,469
Kyle and Carrick	50,032
Monklands	0
Motherwell	0
Renfrew	37,524
Strathkelvin	0
Angus	0
Dundee	0
Perth and Kinross	80,911
Orkney	0
Shetland	5,039,193
Western Isles	4,478,932

Angling

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the levels of fish population in the River Black Cart and the River White Cart; what plans he has to encourage the development of angling on these rivers; and if he will meet representatives of the angling community to discuss potential initiatives.

Sir Hector Monro: The Government have no records of the levels of fish populations on either the River Black Cart or White Cart but I am glad to note that in the last few years salmon have been returning to those waters. Although the development of angling is principally for individual fishery owners or angling clubs, my Department has provided them with scientific advice on a number of matters. I meet representatives of salmon and freshwater fisheries interests when it is appropriate to do so.

Paisley (Movement of Residents)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the movement or migration of residents from the Ferguslie Park partnership area to the Foxbar Rivers area of Paisley since the launch of the Scottish Office led initiative; what has been the expenditure in *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue terms in each area during that period; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has made no estimate of the movement of residents from the Ferguslie Park partnership area to the Foxbar, Rivers area of Paisley. Full information on public expenditure in Ferguslie Park and Foxbar, Rivers since the launch of the Ferguslie Park Partnership is not available. The following tables summarise available information. In all tables "n.a." indicates "not available".

Urban Partnership Vote Expenditure

	£ million
Ferguslie Park	
1989-90	0·135
1990-91	0·405
1991-92	0·538
1992-93	0·575
1993-94	0·639

Note: The Urban Partnership Vote meets most of the running costs of the Partnership and provides some funding for projects and consultancies. Support from this source is only available to Partnership areas and so no figures are shown for Foxbar, Rivers.

Urban programme expenditure

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Ferguslie Park[2]						
Capital	0·217	0·828	1·000	0·750	0·750	0·780
Revenue	0·415	0·536	0·860	1·190	1·390	1·440
Foxbar, Rivers[2]						
Capital	0·007	—	0·018	0·006	0·044	0·176
Revenue	0·281	0·186	0·155	0·134	0·150	0·244

Note: Figures relate to estimated expenditure by Renfrew District Council and Strathclyde Regional Council, 75 per cent. of which is reimbursed by the Scottish Office. These areas will also have benefited from District and Region-wide projects.

	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Expenditure by Renfrewshire Enterprise			
Ferguslie Park	0·532	0·410	0·422
Foxbar, Rivers	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Ferguslie Park	2·700	7·100	6·500
Foxbar, Rivers	0·480	0·480	0·200

Expenditure by Scottish Homes

Housing capital expenditure by Renfrew district council

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Ferguslie Park						
Housing Revenue Account	4·065	3·603	2·764	2·235	1·173	n.a.
Non-housing Revenue Account	—	0·036	—	0·379	0·110	n.a.

Note:—Figures for 1988-89 and 1991-92 are actual outturns; figures for 1992-93 are estimated outturns; no figures are available for 1993-94 as, under the new Housing Plan system, Renfrew District Council was not requested to provide outturn figures; Renfrew District Council should be able to provide 1993-94 figures for Ferguslie Park and figures for Foxbar, Rivers.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all contracts for waste disposal, waste management, cleansing and refuse collection which have been let to private contractors by Scottish local authorities in each of the last five years and in each case showing which company has been awarded the contract and the location of the main headquarters of the company in each case.

Sir Hector Monro: This information is not routinely collected centrally and only partial data are available for 1989, 1990 and 1991. This is listed in the following table. There is no information for 1992 and 1993.

Year	*District*	*Type of contract*	*Company etc. name*	*Address given*
1989	Tweeddale	Refuse disposal	Tarmac Econowaste	Ettingshall, Wolverhampton
1989	Gordon	CFC extraction	Mr. F. Watt North East Refrigeration Services	Constitution Street, Inverurie

Year	District	Type of contract	Company etc. name	Address given
1989	Badenoch and Strathspey	Refuse disposal	J. Armitt Contractor	21 Myrtlefield, Aviemore
1989	Lochaber	Refuse collection/disposal	Knoydart Community Association	Inverie, Knoydart
1989	Skye and Lochalsh	Refuse collection	L. & C. Waste Tech.	Dunvegan Road, Portree
1989	Edinburgh City	Waste disposal	Tarmac Econowaste	Kaimes Quarry, Kirknewton, Edinburgh
		Conveyance/waste/material	British Railways Board	Railfreight Construction, Rail House, Store House, Manchester
1989	Midlothian	Disposal of domestic/trade waste	Wimpey Waste (now UK Waste Management Limited)	Gate House, Turnpike Road, High Wycombe, Bucks
1989	Orkney Islands	Refuse collection	T. & J. Paterson	North School, Eday
		Refuse collection	T. A. Muir	Garso No. 1, North Ronaldsay
		Refuse collection	Mrs. A. Davidson	North Rendall, Papa Westray
		Refuse collection	M. A. Williamson	Olivebank, Stronsay
		Refuse collection	J. & H. Bews	Astley Cottage, Shapinsay
		Refuse collection	W. L. Seatter	Mount Pleasant, Pier Wall, Westray
		Refuse collection	L. Wilson	Hillfield, Sanday
1989	Strathkelvin	Waste disposal	Shanks & McEwan	A8 Edinburgh Road, Coatbridge
1991	Badenoch and Strathspey	Landfill site operation	D. Ritchie	Pineview, Carrbridge
		Tip control/litter control	D. Ritchie	Pineview, Carrbridge
1991	Lochaber	Refuse transfer/disposal	Caird Environmental Ltd.	Greengairs, Riggend
1991	Eastwood	Street cleansing	Summerlea Garage	Thornliebank, Glasgow
1991	Shetland Islands	Refuse disposal	P & O Ferries	—
1990	Gordon	CFC extraction	Mr. F. Watt North East Refrigeration Services	Constitution Street, Inverurie
1990	Badenoch and Strathspey	Civic Amenity Skip Hire	John Williamson	Ashwood, Kingussie

Women's Centre, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue expenditure committed to the development of the women's centre in the Rivers area of Foxbar, Paisley, from urban programme, local authority and other sources; and if he will make a statement on this initiative.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Urban programme grant of £172,386 for capital costs and, for four years, £94,308 per annum for current costs, was approved on 7 September 1992. The sponsoring local authority, Strathclyde regional council, meets 25 per cent. of those amounts; 75 per cent. is met by the Scottish Office. I have no information about financial assistance from other sources.

Partnership Initiative, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will launch a partnership in the Foxbar, Rivers area of Paisley on a similar basis to that which exists in Ferguslie Park; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Decisions on the future direction of urban regeneration policy in Scotland and on the possible designation of future initiative areas will be taken in the light of the policy review which is currently under way. This review is taking account of the wide range of views expressed in response to the Scottish Office consultation paper, "Progress in Partnership".

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his most up-to-date estimate of the population of Ferguslie Park, Paisley in each year since 1988; what was the population of the area when the Ferguslie Park initiative was launched; what is his best estimate of the number of people resident in the area at that time who are still resident there; what evaluation he has undertaken of the residential ingress and egress of people from the area over that period; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the population of Ferguslie Park since the Ferguslie Park partnership was launched in 1988 is available from two sources. A sample household survey commissioned by the Scottish Office in 1988, shortly after the partnership was formed, estimated the population to be 5,005. The 1991 census of population showed that the population in April of that year was 4,657. No estimate has yet been made of the number of people resident in the area at the time that the partnership was launched who are still resident there. However, a recently completed repeat sample household survey will shortly yield some information on this topic and on the characteristics of households moving into the area since 1988. This survey will also provide a 1993 estimate of population. No attempt has been made to survey households who have left the area since 1988.

Appointments

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* name, *(b)* appointment and *(c)* salary, allowance, honorarium or other payment of each person resident within the area of Eastwood district council and the Barrhead regional division, including Neilson and Uplawmoor, who has been appointed to any position by him or any of his Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The addresses of appointees are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Women's Centre, Hunterhill

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in relation to the development of a women's centre in the Hunterhill area of Paisley on a similar basis to that provided in the Rivers area of Foxbar.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Foxbar, Rivers womens centre was provided through the urban programme. Should an application for a similar facility be submitted for the Hunterhill area of Paisley it will be considered against the eligibility criteria and priorities of the urban programme.

Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the most recent estimate of the number of Scottish houses owned by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* Scottish Homes, *(c)* housing associations, *(d)* private landlords, *(e)* co-operatives and *(f)* other tenure types which are affected by rising and penetrating damp, and rising and penetrating dampness and condensation; how long, at current rates of expenditure, it will take to eliminate these problems; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information about the condition of the housing stock in Scotland is contained in the report of the first Scottish house condition survey, produced by Scottish Homes and published in 1993. It gives details of the number of houses affected by rising or penetrating damp and suffering from dampness and condensation. A copy of the report is available in the Library.

It is not possible to determine how long it will take to deal with those problems. The responsibility for improving houses in the private sector rests with their owners and improvement grant is available to assist them. Local authorities, Scottish Homes, housing associations and other agencies have responsibility for their own stock and must deal with these problems within the resources available to them.

Condensation and dampness have been identified as national priorities for the use of resources and local authorities have been asked to prepare strategies for dealing with these problems and to set output targets against which to measure their performance.

Johnstone North Industrial Improvement Area

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to make further funds available to the Johnstone north industrial improvement area; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Urban programme funds of £25,000 per annum have been made available from 1988-89 to 1994-95 for improvements to properties in the Johnstone north industrial improvement area. It is for Renfrew district council, the sponsoring local authority, to consider whether it wishes to apply for further funds.

Mental Health

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evaluation he has made of the success of the after-care tasks initiative—ACTIVE—run by Renfrew district council for mental health; if he will provide additional mainline or urban programme funding to enable ACTIVE to develop further its services and programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has not evaluated the work of the aftercare tasks initiative project. However, based on an evaluation by Strathclyde regional council of the project's first four years of urban programme-funded operations, we have recently approved a further three years' urban programme grant of £75,770 per annum. It would be for Strathclyde regional council to consider whether additional mainline or urban programme funding would be appropriate.

Next Steps Agency Initiatives

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's plans in relation to next steps agency initiatives for *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996.

Mr. Lang: I am now responsible for eight next steps executive agencies. The latest of these, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, was launched on 5 April 1994. It is Government policy that all agencies should be reviewed some three years after their launch. I announced on 28 April 1994 that, following such a review, agency status should continue for the Registers of Scotland. The reviews of Historic Scotland and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency are nearing completion and I hope to make an announcement shortly on the outcome of those reviews. The triennial review of the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency is due to be completed by April 1995 and those of the Scottish Office Pensions Agency, the Scottish Prison Service and Scottish Record Office by April 1996. I announced on 10 May 1994 that the Scottish Court Service, part of the Scottish Courts Administration, will be established as an executive agency from 3 April 1995. I have also announced previously that the Fisheries Research Services and the Roads Directorate are under consideration for executive agency status. I will make an announcement about their future in due course.

Contaminated Land

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of financial allocation made to Scottish Enterprise and the Glasgow development agency to deal specifically with clearing up contaminated land, in 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Stewart: The resources which my right hon. Friend allocates to Scottish Enterprise, and those which Scottish Enterprise allocates to the local enterprise companies, are allocated within expenditure blocks and not generally for a specific purpose or activity.

It is for Scottish Enterprise and the individual local enterprise companies to decide, in the context of the strategic and policy guidance given to them and within the overall resources allocated to them, the priority and resources to be devoted to a particular project or activity such as decontamination works.

Motorway Building Costs

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much, on average, it costs to construct a mile of motorway with lighting and signage at current prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average cost to construct a mile of motorway with lighting and signing, including land and preparation costs but excluding VAT at current prices is as follows:

Rural three-lane motorway: Approximately £6·8 million.
Urban two-lane motorway: Approximately £11 million.

The average cost for the rural three-lane motorway is based on the current A74 upgrading contracts where lighting was installed mainly at junction locations. Urban motorways can vary greatly in cost depending upon such factors as the remodelling of associated networks, urban fabric and land costs.

Flood Protection

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will use any powers available to him to assist with flood protection measures at Park avenue, Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961, powers to protect non-agricultural land from flooding rest with regional and islands councils. It is for Strathclyde regional council to determine the extent to which it will use these powers to protect any such land at Park avenue, Paisley. Flood prevention schemes made by councils and confirmed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State currently attract grant at the rate of 50 per cent. on the eligible costs.

Sandeel Fishing

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the numbers of Danish boats currently fishing for sandeels over traditional Fife fishing grounds.

Sir Hector Monro: Around 50 Danish sandeel vessels have been sighted in the North sea, some 20 to 40 miles east of the Fife coast. The sandeel fishery is highly seasonal and this activity is only expected to last between four and six weeks.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the tonnage of sandeels caught by Danish vessels over traditional Scottish fishing grounds in each of the last five years; and what was the value of the sandeels caught.

(2) what assessment he has made of the tonnage of sandeels caught by Danish vessels over the Wee bankie, the Cockenzie bank and the Marr bank in each of the last five years; and what was the value of the sandeels caught.

Sir Hector Monro: The following table shows sandeel catches taken by all nations in the western central North sea —an area extending from the Firth of Tay to Flamborough Head, extending roughly 120 miles into the North Sea. The 1993 figures will become available later this year. Separate figures are not readily available for Danish catches.

Year	*Catch ('000 tonnes)*	*Average value per tonne £*
1988	291·1	36
1989	228·3	39
1990	141·4	45
1991	228·2	48
1992	422·4	46

Source: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (catches): Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department (value of catches).

The bulk of these catches were taken in the southern and eastern parts of the area. Estimated catch in the Marr bank, Wee bankie and Cockenzie bank was 60,000 tonnes in 1992.

Further Education College Lecturers

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future arrangements for the initial training of further education college lecturers in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In recent years, much has been done to raise the status and quality of further education in Scotland so that students have the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities through vocational as well as academic routes.

If FE students are to receive top-quality education, college lecturers must themselves be effectively trained to provide it. The kind of training that they receive has a significant bearing on the standards of education the public expect FE colleges to deliver. This is why the Government set up a review committee in May 1992 to consider and make recommendations on the future arrangements for the initial training of lecturers. The report of the review committee was published in September last year and has since been the subject of an extensive consultation exercise with representatives of the education sector.

The Government fully endorse the report's conclusions that lecturing staff in further education should be trained and qualified to the highest standards. In writing to the FE colleges about their development plans, before final decisions were reached on the report, Scottish Office Education Department officials stressed the desirability, in the interests of both colleges and lecturers, of continuing to support the teaching qualification (further education) course offered by the Scottish school of further education, which is now part of Strathclyde university. I am glad to say that there has been an encouraging response and an increase in the uptake of places on the course. Although we do not intend to make it compulsory for lecturers to undertake the course, we accept the report's recommendation that lecturers should be strongly encouraged to undertake the teaching qualification (further education) course and will continue to explore ways in which the recent increase in uptake can be sustained. The General Teaching Council for Scotland will also, of course, continue to accredit the TQ(FE) course for registration purposes and to encourage prospective lecturers to register, although, as recommended in the report, registration will continue to be a matter for individuals. Relationships between FE and schools will develop as a result of our

"Higher Still" proposals and, since incorporation, a variety of FE/HE links have emerged. We accept, therefore, the report's recommendation that the issues of compulsory qualification and GTC registration should be reconsidered in a few years time in the light of these developments.

To ensure the effective implementation of the other recommendations in the report, we will establish a working group, with strong representation from the FE sector, to define FE training needs and competences, and to draw up national guidelines on which future TQ(FE) courses will be based. The working group, assisted by the short-term appointment of a consultant, will be asked to report by November 1994. In tandem with this exercise, the Scottish Office Education Department will, in conjunction with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, conduct an analysis of the costs of the current TQ(FE) course and consider costed options for its future funding. In the meantime, the existing TQ(FE) course will continue to be provided solely by the Scottish school of further education. The school will be invited to embody as many as possible of the Anderson committee recommendations into the course structure and content, and to collaborate with the colleges to ensure that it is stimulating, responsive and relevant.

Regional Enterprise Grant

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number and value of regional enterprise grants for *(a)* innovation and *(b)* investment and regional selective assistance awards for the Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and North-East Fife travel-to-work areas for the year ended 1 August 1993.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The information requested is given in the table. North-East Fife TTWA was not classed as an assisted area in either the previous or current version of the assisted areas map.

Regional Enterprise Grants and Regional Selective Assistance Offers accepted 1 August 1992 to 31 July 1993

Travel-to-work area	*Regional Innovation Grants*		*Regional Investment Grants*		*Regional Selective Assistance*	
	Number	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*
Dunfermline	5	125,000	2	17,659	3	240,000
Kirkcaldy	4	97,630	8	102,873	8	2,774,000

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the level of regional selective assistance grants and regional enterprise grants in Fife compared to the number and levels of grant offered.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The data from projects completed either successfully or otherwise in recent years have shown that, on average, 70 per cent. of the value of regional selective assistance offers accepted in Scotland was eventually paid. The comparable figure for regional enterprise grants was 75 per cent. Figures for individual regions will fluctuate around these levels.

Capital Investment

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the level of capital investment by manufacturing firms by local authority region and for Scotland over the last three years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The information is set out in the following table. Figures are provided from the last three years for which information is available:

£ million

Region	*1991*	*1990*	*1989*
Borders	10·9	17·3	16·2
Central	292·4	220·7	185·3
Dumfries and Galloway	31·8	30·5	33·0
Fife	72·7	90·8	87·2
Grampian	105·2	106·6	91·0
Highland	25·2	29·6	23·1
Lothian	177·3	165·9	200·1
Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles	3·0	2·2	3·9
Strathclyde	417·0	521·1	522·0
Tayside	69·9	106·3	70·5
Scottish total	1,205·5	1,291·0	1,232·2

Source: Annual Census of Production 1989-1991.

Woodlands

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing how many Forestry Commission woodlands have been sold to the private sector since 1980, or from whichever year figures are available; how many of these are subject to *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* legally binding access agreements; what is the total hectarage of these woodlands; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* Between July 1981, when the Forestry Commission's disposals programme started, and 31 March 1994, the Commission sold some 2,500 individual areas of forest land covering 105,000 hectares. Arrangements for securing continued public access to Forestry Commission woodlands, by way of prior agreements entered into between the Commission and local authorities, were introduced in October 1991. By 31 March 1994, the Commission had sold eight areas of forest land, covering 123 hectares, which are subject to legally binding access agreements. The Commission does not maintain records of the extent of voluntary public access allowed to woodlands sold without legally binding agreements.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to support or promote the development of low or zero-emission vehicles for use in public transport services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department is collaborating with other Departments on a programme of field trials for alternative fuelled vehicles. For further details, I refer the

hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic on 28 June 1994, *Official Report*, columns *477-78*.

Post Office

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 26 May, *Official Report*, columns *324-25*, where he has published his estimate of the effect of granting each specific request of the Post Office for greater commercial freedom, including its effect on *(a)* the current business and *(b)* projects of existing private firms.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have published no such estimates.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement clarifying the Government's position regarding the future of the postal service.

Mr. Heseltine: We will be publishing a Green Paper shortly.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) whether Parcelforce will retain its VAT exempt status once it is privatised;

(2) what services offered by *(a)* the Royal Mail and *(b)* Parcelforce which are currently zero-rated will attract VAT after privatisation;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 16 June, *Official Report*, column *630*, whether all the services at present offered by Parcelforce will retain their VAT zero-rating status after privatisation.

Mr. McLoughlin: The issue of VAT on postal services will be covered in the Green Paper on postal services, which will be published shortly.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether draft controls have been drawn up for privatisation of all or any part of the work done by the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No decision has yet been taken on whether work currently undertaken by the Insolvency Service should be contracted out to the private sector. No draft controls have been drawn up.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the conclusions of the current review into the Insolvency Service by Stoy Hayward on whether the private sector can beat the Insolvency Service for value for money.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Stoy Hayward is not due to complete its study until the end of July 1994.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much additional money is planned to be spent on the Insolvency Service in the financial year 1994-95.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The 1994-95 running cost provision to the Insolvency Service provides an additional £2·66 million compared with its 1993-94 expenditure.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what level of checks is being imposed on files in the Insolvency Service before they are closed; what staff are doing the checking; and on what length of contract they are employed.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: All files are read by specialist, permanent staff before they are closed.

Competitiveness White Paper

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account was taken of the law of comparative costs in international trade and developing the proposals in his White Paper on competitiveness.

Mr. Sainsbury: As the White Paper on competitiveness makes it clear, the Government are committed to fair and open markets which provide a spur to enterprise and improved efficiency. This allows the United Kingdom to export those goods which it can produce most efficiently in line with the law of comparative costs.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to investigate the relationship between the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and major accountancy firms.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no such plans.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will initiate an inquiry into the role of British accountancy firms in money laundering in the case of AGIP.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* No. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales has already investigated this matter.

Industrial Capacity

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing for each industry the estimated percentage utilisation of capacity in 1990 and the increase or decrease in output since 1990 at the latest available date, together with the estimated utilisation of capacity.

Mr. Sainsbury: Official data on capacity utilisation by industry are not available. The CBI industrial trends survey monitors changes in balances of companies reporting below capacity working, by industry groups. Industrial output figures are published in the monthly digest of statistics. Both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Electricity

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column 231, if he will make a statement on the proposals for opening up the international market in electricity.

Mr. Eggar: The Government welcome the European Commission's proposals to liberalise the electricity market in the European Union. The European energy market must be opened up if costs are to be driven down and the competitiveness of European industry improved. The Government's objective is therefore to reach agreement on the Commission's proposals as soon as possible.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to encourage the electricity generating industry to buy from British suppliers.

Mr. Eggar: The electricity generating industry buys from competitive suppliers. The White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win", Cm 2563, sets out the approach that the Government are taking to ensure that British suppliers maximise their competitiveness.

Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which sections of the Companies Acts the recognised supervisory bodies owe a duty of care to shareholders, creditors, employees, bank depositors and pension scheme members.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Companies Acts do not impose a statutory duty of care on the recognised supervisory bodies.

Gas Industry

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what training his Department provided or funded for the Director General of Gas Supply prior to her appointment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Ms Spottiswoode was appointed as Director General designate one month before she took up post as Director General of Gas Supply on 1 November 1992, so that she could familiarise herself with the industry and with current issues. My Department was aware of her intention to attend a course on the gas industry before she took up her appointment but was not asked to contribute to the cost.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information was supplied to his Department during the appointment process by the Director General of Gas Supply concerning connection with the gas industry as called for in paragraph 14 of his job specification.

Mr. Eggar: Ms Spottiswoode's connections with the gas industry were made known to the Department both by the executive search consultants and by Ms Spottiswoode herself during the appointment process.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, further to his White paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win", whether he considered the effect of movements on the exchange rate on competitiveness; and if he will publish his estimate of the amount by which labour productivity in manufacturing would have to rise to offset the increase in United Kingdom relative export prices compared with those of Germany since February 1993.

Mr. Sainsbury: As the White Paper makes it clear, the Government believe that the United Kingdom's competitiveness depends on improving productivity and controlling costs.

Company Inspections

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions since 1979 his Department has discussed conflicts of interests with the individuals appointed to act as inspectors to investigate company affairs.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 13 April 1994, *Official Report,* column 229.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many of the individuals currently acting as inspectors under the provisions of the Companies Acts have any business connection with any accountancy and/or law firm criticised in reports by his Department.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Three current Companies Act inspectors have business connections with accountancy firms which have been the subject of criticism in a published inspectors' report.

Steel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made as to the adequacy of the supply of home-produced or imported steel; and if he will publish a table showing *(a)* United Kingdom production, imports and net home disposals of steel in each month in 1989 and in this year to date, *(b)* the rate of return on capital required to make it profitable for United Kingdom steel manufacturers to invest in new capacity in the United Kingdom at current rates of exchange and *(c)* the actual rates of return on replacement and historic cost in 1993 generally and for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: Estimates of the adequacy of steel supply are a matter for industry. The available figures of production, imports and net home disposals are published in the monthly digest of statistics—table 10.2—a copy of which is in the Library of the House. It is for companies to decide what rate of return is required to make investment in new capacity profitable. There are no official data on rates of return, but information may be available from commercial organisations that analyse company accounts.

British Coal

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the number, standard and quality of those companies which have pre-qualified to buy the mining assets of British Coal; whether he has now invited further companies to make offers for those assets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: In considering all applications to pre-qualify, DTI, in consultation with its advisers, took into account a range of factors, including the technical and commercial ability of applicants to manage regional coal companies and care and maintenance collieries, and the likely ability of the applicant to finance any bid they may tender. No further companies have been invited to make offers for the mining assets of the British Coal Corporation.

Pyramid Selling

Mr. Hanson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions for the contravention of the Pyramid Selling Schemes Regulations 1989 and the Pyramid Selling Schemes (Amendment) Regulations 1990 took place in 1993-94; and how many were successful.

Mr. McLoughlin: There were no such prosecutions in 1993-94.

Skills Shortages

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with *(a)* his Government colleagues, *(b)* employers' organisations and *(c)* the training and enterprise councils regarding the Price Waterhouse report on the west midlands economy with particular reference to skills shortages.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government office for the west midlands is aware of the Price Waterhouse report, which is one of a series on the west midlands economy. GOWM will be taking the report into account alongside others in discussions with TECs and representational bodies following publication of the White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win".

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to take new measures to deal with skills shortages in conjunction with his Government colleagues.

Mr. Sainsbury: The supply of skilled labour is one of the key competitiveness issues addressed in the Government's White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win", Cm. 2563. New measures to be implemented over the next three years are outlined in the White Paper. Training is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Eggar: My Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing follows the code of practice on open government.

Receivers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation under which receivers would owe a duty of care to the unsecured creditors.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no plans to do so.

Nuclear Safety Convention

Mr. Trend: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made on proposals for an international nuclear safety convention.

Mr. Eggar: A convention on nuclear safety was agreed by more than 70 states at a diplomatic conference at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna on 17 June. It will be open for signature from 20 September and will enter into force after ratification by 22 states, including 17 states with at least one civil nuclear power plant.

The main objective of the convention is to achieve and maintain a high level of nuclear safety worldwide. Countries ratifying the convention will submit national reports, for discussion at periodic review meetings, on how they meet or intend to meet safety obligations established in the convention. The Government welcome the agreement on the convention text and hope that the states with civil nuclear powers plants will ratify the convention.

Carnon Holdings Ltd.

Mr. Coe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his Department's loans to Carnon Holdings Ltd.

Mr. Heseltine: I have today agreed to a conditional waiver of repayment of my Department's loans outstanding to Carnon Holdings Ltd.

Two loans were extended to the company, in 1986 and 1988, totalling £23·4 million, to safeguard employment at the company's South Crofty tin mine. When the loans were offered, independent forecasters were expecting that the tin price would recover; this would have permitted Carnon to trade profitably and hence repay the loans. However, the continuing low price of tin has meant that there is no longer any realistic prospect of repayment.

The waiving of repayment of the loans is dependent on two conditions: that the company succeeds, by the closing date of 4 August, in raising the "minimum subscription" set out in its prospectus to be published on 30 June; and that the House of Commons does not object to this waiver before the closing date.

The waiving of the debts is intended to permit Carnon the opportunity to raise fresh funding to continue its operations but my decision is not intended to imply any comment on or endorsement of the company's financial standing or position. Any potential investor must form his or her own judgment of the merits of investing on the basis of information supplied by Carnon.

Fire Safety

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the Deregulation Bill construction task force;

(2) if he will make it his policy not to make any changes to the Fire Precautions Act 1971 until there has been a debate in the House; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the recommendations of the Home Office fire safety division to the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill contruction task force;

(4) which fire service organisations and local authority organisations were consulted by the construction task force before it produced its recommendations regarding deregulation of fire safety regulations.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The recommendations of all seven business deregulation task forces were published on 19 January and copies were placed in the Library of the House. The working papers on which their recommendations were based were placed in the Library of the House on 30 March.

The construction industry task force held discussions with officials and Ministers in several Government Departments, including the Home Office. No discussions were held with fire service or local authority organisations because the nature of the task force exercise was to provide the Government with evidence of business concerns.

The fire safety review, announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *381*, explored issues identified by the task force and others. Publication of the report of this review was announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 22 June, *Official Report*, columns *228-29*. The Government are committed to full consultation on the report with all interested parties and we have made it clear that no changes will be made to existing arrangements until these consultations are complete.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will publish the recommendations of the construction industry deregulation task force; and if he will make a statement on the review of fire safety and enforcement carried out by the task force.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The recommendations of all seven business deregulation task forces were published on 19 January and copies were placed in the Library of the House. The working papers on which their recommendations were based were placed in the Library of the House on 30 March.

Publication of the review of fire safety legislation and enforcement was announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 22 June, *Official Report*, columns *228-29* and I have nothing further to add to his statement.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Chain Letter Earnings Schemes

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action has been taken to facilitate tracing of promoters of chain letter earnings schemes; and what further measures he plans;

(2) what representations have been made to him regarding chain letter earnings schemes in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many complaints he has received with regard to participants who have suffered financially as a result of chain letter earnings schemes in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what action is being taken to increase the protection of the participant in chain letter earnings schemes;

(5) if he will make a statement on chain letter earnings schemes; and what steps he has taken to maximise the awareness of the possible offences that can be committed under these schemes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am replying because chain letters involving money-making schemes have in some cases been held by the courts to be illegal lotteries under provisions now contained in the Lotteries and Amusement Act 1976 because they have the overall object of distributing money by chance. The schemes are also subject to the general criminal law on theft and fraud, for the enforcement of which—including the tracing of suspected offenders—the police are responsible.

Whether a particular scheme is an illegal lottery is a matter which only a court could decide. The advice given to recipients of "get-rich-quick" schemes is to ignore their claims or, if they wish to take matters further, to pass offending materials to the police for consideration and possible investigation. Information on prosecutions under the 1976 Act involving chain letter schemes is not held centrally.

During 1993-94 the Home Office received seven letters from Members of Parliament on behalf of constituents and four letters from members of the public about chain letter schemes. None of the letters concerned participants who had suffered financially.

Gammahydroxybutyrate

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to propose to control the availability and promotion of gammahydroxybutyrate; and what assessment he has made, and on what basis, about the availability of gammahydroxybutyrate in England and Wales and its promotion on a commercial basis.

Mr. Maclean: Gammahydroxybutyrate—also known as GHB or GBH—is manufactured in the United States of America for use as an anaesthetic. It is not available as a licensed medicine in the United Kingdom but the manufacture, advertisement and sale of the substance fall within the scope of the Medicines Act 1968 as it has pharmacological effects.

We understand that the Medicines Control Agency, an agency of the Department of Health, is currently investigating its promotion and sale following recent press reports that the substance is being marketed in the United Kingdom. The maximum penalties on indictment for advertising, production and sale of an unlicensed medicine are two years imprisonment and/or a fine of £5,000.

Gammahydroxybutyrate has only recently emerged as a drug of misuse in the United Kingdom. We understand it has a stimulant effect if taken in small doses and that larger doses can cause vomiting, drowsiness, depressed breathing and heart rate. The first reported seizure of GHB was made in April this year using powers under the Medicines Act 1968.

There have been up to now only a few reports of gammahydroxybutyrate misuse and we have no plans at present to bring it under the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The key criterion for bringing a substance under the Act's controls is whether misuse of the substance has or is capable of having harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem. The position is being kept under review.

Escort and Custody Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks are carried out by the police on applicants who apply for work at contracted-out prisons and for the contracted-out court escort service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 29 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the checks carried out by the police on applicants who apply for work at contracted out prisons and for the contracted court escort service.

In my letter of 22 June, Official Report, column 171, I referred to the routine enquiries that are made about all people who wish to work at contracted out prisons and for the contracted court escort service. These investigations are similar to those made in relation to applicants for Prison Service employment and include checks made by the police against records held in the Criminal Records Office. Candidates applying for employment in custodial duties and escort functions in both the public and the private sector are exempted from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 by the Rehabilitation Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975. Convictions which ordinarily are regarded as "spent" are therefore taken into account.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column *169*, how many grades of employee working in the court escort service in the Metropolitan police area there will be when Securicor takes over the contract; what will be the pay for each grade; and how the pay and grading compare with that of the current incumbents.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 29 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of grades of employee working in the court escort service in the Metropolitan Police area when Securicor takes over the contract; the pay for each grade and how the pay and grading compare with that of the current incumbents.

There are two basic uniformed grades, prisoner custody officers and supervisory prisoner custody officers, excluding the senior management and administration staff at Securicor's headquarters.

The core grades who are currently performing these duties are police constables and police sergeants, prison officers and senior prison officers.

The pay of prisoner custody officers is determined by the contractor concerned. Details are not held by the Prison Service and it is for the contractor to decide whether they should be made public.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A decision on whether to publish a particular report by external consultants in relation to market testing would be based on all the relevant circumstances, including any necessary commercial considerations.

Paedophile Unit

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are expected to be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the new paedophile unit at the National Criminal Intelligence Service in the context of the possible disbanding of the obscence publications branch at Scotland Yard.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No proposals about the future of the obscene publications branch have yet been made, but the Metropolitan police has given assurances that its work will continue whatever the recommendations of the current headquarters and specialist units' review.

The branch is an operational unit, responsible for the investigation of paedophile offences. The paedophile unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service is a non-operational, national intelligence unit. The two units have different and distinct roles and it would not be appropriate for the National Criminal Intelligence Service to take on any operational functions from the branch.

Firearms Certificates

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been raised from the issue of firearms and shotgun certificates in each year since 1990 and in the current year to date; and when he expects to make an announcement of the outcome of discussions on the levy attached to firearm and shotgun certificates.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The following sums have been raised from the issue and renewal of firearm and shotgun certificates.

Year	*£*
1990	5,286,500
1991	5,130,200
1992	4,988,800

Figures are not yet available for 1993 or 1994. An announcement on the outcome of the current review of firearms fees will be made as soon as possible.

Secure Training Centres

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now name the fifth site for a secure training centre covering the London and south-east area.

Mr. Maclean: The centre will be located on Home Office land at Cookham wood in Kent adjacent to, but separate from, the Prison Service establishment.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make draft rules for secure training centres available to the House.

Mr. Maclean: Rules for the regulation and management of secure training centres will be made by statutory instrument and, as such, will not be available in their final form until after the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill receives Royal Assent. However, in order to indicate to potential contractors what areas the rules will cover in order to assist them in formulating their tenders, an administrative paper has been prepared which outlines proposed rules for secure training centres. A copy of this paper has been placed in the Library today.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now publish details of the design and build specification of the proposed secure training centres for young offenders.

Mr. Maclean: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the design and build specification, together with an associated note to tenderers containing information on performance standards.

Criminal Offences (Charges)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in tabular form which actions have been made criminal offences by legislative changes for each year since 1979, giving details of the Act which brought about the change.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firearm permits and shotgun certificates were issued in Wales in 1993; and what are the projected figures for 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A total of 2,976 firearms certificates were issued in Wales during 1992—701 new certificates and 2,275 renewals—and 20,481 shot gun certificates were issued—3,252 new certificates and 17,229 renewals.

Figures for 1993 are not yet available and it is not the practice to make projections for the future.

Police Cars

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civilians have died in each of the last five years in accidents involving police cars.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The centrally available information relates to accidents where death to civilians has arisen in the course of either police pursuits or responses to emergency calls.

The figures for England and Wales are as follows:

Year	*Civilian fatalities*
1989	36
1990	23
1991	30
1992	28
1993	28

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the inclusion of section 11 funding into the single regeneration budget on metropolitan authorities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Existing commitments under section 11 will continue to the end of the approved project life. Thereafter, the allocation of funding under the single regeneration budget will be determined on the basis of applications reflecting local priorities, within the terms of the bidding guidance. The specific aims of the budget include initiatives intended to

"enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people, particularly the young and those at a disadvantage, and promote equality of opportunity"

and to

"promote initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities".

Immigration

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many different individuals have been detained under the Immigration Act powers during the most recent 12-month period; and how many of them were *(a)* asylum seekers and *(b)* others.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1993, 10,530 people were detained overnight or longer under powers contained in the Immigration Act 1971.

These records do not distinguish between asylum seekers and others.

Drink Driving

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notifiable offences of causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by careless driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs there were in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993, when the criteria used to calculate the 1991 figures are applied.

Mr. Maclean: The offence of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drugs or alcohol was created by the Road Traffic Act 1991. Since 1992 police forces have provided the Home Office with the number of offences of causing death by dangerous driving together with the number of offences of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These combined figures for 1992 and 1993 were published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, "Notifiable Offences England and Wales 1993". It is not possible to ascertain what the numbers of offences would have been if the pre-1992 classification were still in place.

Combat 18

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the activities of Combat 18; and what plans he has to ban the organisation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government deplore the activities of any group which advocates violence. The police are well aware of the activities of Combat 18 and any alleged attacks or intimidation should be reported to them. There are no statutory powers to proscribe organisations in Great Britain other than in the special circumstances provided for in the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Arrests

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were arrested by the Metropolitan police each year from 1980 to 1993.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the following table:

Arrests made by the Metropolitan Police for notifiable offences, 1980 to 1993

Year	*Number of arrests*
1980	105,017
1981	97,276
1982	100,804
1983	99,258
1984	104,017
1985	109,786

Year	Number of arrests
1986	103,084
1987	109,706
1988	108,706
1989	111,420
1990	116,865
1991	113,570
1992	100,426
1993	93,020

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were arrested in each police force area in England and Wales in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the following table:

Arrests in England and Wales in 1992 and 1993, by police force area

Police force area	Arrests in 1992	Arrests in 1993
Avon and Somerset	35,532	36,874
Bedfordshire	17,220	18,136
Cambridgeshire	17,787	18,307
Cheshire	30,688	30,603
Cleveland	29,462	29,430
Cumbria	21,132	20,020
Derbyshire	24,241	23,309
Devon and Cornwall	33,538	35,049
Dorset	18,716	16,826
Durham	24,828	24,986
Essex	41,986	38,526
Gloucestershire	18,284	17,341
Greater Manchester	121,466	123,996
Hampshire	62,016	61,991
Hertfordshire	25,313	25,388
Humberside	35,324	30,926
Kent	54,254	52,551
Lancashire	62,345	63,285
Leicestershire	22,859	22,287
Lincolnshire	21,286	15,195
London, City of	4,516	5,202
Merseyside	75,634	70,414
Norfolk	19,750	19,386
Northamptonshire	19,906	19,873
Northumbria	70,734	69,907
North Yorkshire	23,020	23,867
Nottinghamshire	46,733	41,512
South Yorkshire	46,297	46,324
Staffordshire	38,935	38,322
Suffolk	16,612	15,758
Surrey	20,511	17,846
Sussex	38,365	37,844
Thames Valley	59,144	57,748
Warwickshire	13,612	15,439
West Mercia	35,042	36,269
West Midlands	135,262	131,753
West Yorkshire	84,332	63,407
Wiltshire	13,860	15,624
Dyfed Powys	14,823	14,325
Gwent	17,552	18,708
North Wales	24,568	25,674
South Wales	57,412	57,030
England and Wales (excluding MPD)	1,594,897	1,567,238
Metropolitan Police[1]	100,426	93,020

[1]Notifiable offences only.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much in cash terms and in constant prices the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on the reception of asylum seekers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There are no formal reception arrangements for asylum seekers. They are entitled to a range of statutory benefits and services which are available to the rest of the population. The Government provide funding to voluntary organisations to advise and assist newly arrived asylum seekers, and to meet the costs of short term, emergency accommodation and maintenance for destitute asylum seekers before they gain access to the statutory system. Grants to voluntary organisations for this purpose for the financial years 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-93 are set out in the table and taken at 1990 prices. No grants were made to assist the reception of asylum seekers in 1980.

Year	Cash terms £	Constant prices £
1990-91	312,000	312,000
1991-92	830,650	781,421
1992-93	939,600	851,087

Commercial Vehicles (Accidents)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the verdicts of unlawful killing which have been recorded by coroners in relation to accidents involving *(a)* light goods vehicles and *(b)* PCVs over the last five years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

European Elections

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will cause an inquiry to be undertaken, in cases where European law forbids the revelation of names and addresses of nominators of a candidate in European Union elections and where there are prima facia grounds for complaint, which could examine the bona fides of the nominators and investigate the background and political and financial connections of relevant candidates whose departure abroad makes them unavailable for questioning;

(2) if he will cite the precise European statute which prohibits *(a)* other candidates and *(b)* members of the public from having sight of candidates' nominators, their names and addresses, in an election to the European Parliament.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We know of no such European law. As is the case at parliamentary elections, at European parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom candidates and the elections agents, proposers and seconders of candidates may attend the proceedings and inspect the nomination papers during the period for delivery of nomination papers. The addresses of the proposer, seconder and assentors are not given on nomination papers, although their electoral numbers are given. The names of

the persons nominating and seconding a candidate for election to the European Parliament are published in the statement of persons nominated.

UK Det. Services Ltd.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the contractors have defaulted on any part of the contract to manage Blakenhurst prison; what was the nature of the default on each occasion; and what was the penalty imposed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 29 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Blakenhurst prison.

Default notices have been issued against the contractors on two occasions and payment has been withheld on one occasion. Under the terms of the contract, a default notice may be issued if satisfactory progress has not been made within 20 days of a warning.

On the two occasions where default notices have been issued, the first related to security in cells and the second to maintenance. These problems were rectified satisfactorily. There are no default notices outstanding at present.

In the light of the incident on 24 February which occurred in one of the houseblocks, the Prison Service did not consider that UKDS fully delivered the required service during that month. During the incident, some parts of the prison were not fully in control, with consequent effects on regime delivery; and public relations and contingency arrangements were not satisfactory. The areas where the service was not considered to be up to the required standard were outlined in my letter of 12 April (Official Report, Column 3).

There was a financial penalty imposed, and the sum which was withheld from UKDS was £41,166·90, exclusive of VAT, which in our judgement represented the extent to which the required level of service had not been delivered in February.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the Home Office has given consent for United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. to alter the services provided under the terms of the contract to run Blakenhurst prison; and what alterations were made.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 29 June 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of occasions on which consent has been given for United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. to alter the services provided under the terms of the contract to run Blakenhurst Prison; and what alterations were made.

It was agreed in May 1994 that United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. could alter the contractual basis on which two of the services were provided. First, the number of hours out of cell was reduced from 15 to 14. Second, visiting arrangements were changed to take account of actual visiting patterns. As a result the visiting period has been changed from 13.00—21.00 to 13.00—20.00, and additional morning visits, particularly during school holidays, at Christmas and on other Bank Holidays, have been added.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

House of Commons

Mr. Walden: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the origins of the 10 o'clock rule in respect of business of the House; what assessment he has made to its suitability to current conditions; and what plans he has to change it.

Mr. Newton: The origins of the 10 o'clock rule lie in the 1880's. Following a report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary Procedure in 1886, William Smith, the then First Lord of the Treasury, proposed in 1888 a series of rules of procedure. The impetus for the regulation of the hours of the House resulted from a series of very late sittings in the previous sessions. The hours of sitting of the House have been regulated by Standing Order since 1888 to the present day, except during the period 1940-47 when they were regulated by Sessional Order. Prior to 1888 only Wednesday and morning sittings were regulated.

I am currently having discussions with the hon. Member for Newcastle Upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), in the light of the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House. The report did not however envisage a change to the 10 o'clock rule.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee specifically to consider the needs and rights of disabled people.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

DEFENCE

Parachute Jumps

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *749*, about static line fatalities, whether the four fatalities were included in "Static Line Fatalities Under Training", published in October 1992.

Mr. Hanley: Of the four static line parachute jump fatalities at Weston-on-the-Green between 1978 and 1983 included in my answer of 16 March, three were listed in October 1992 in a document entitled "Static Line Fatalities Under Training". The fourth, that of Private Bradshaw on 13 June 1978, was not included owing to an administrative error.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the accident during military training at Weston-on-the-Green in August 1972 involving Nicholas James.

Mr. Hanley: Senior Under Officer Nicholas James sustained concussion and injuries to his legs and lower spine as a result of a military parachute training accident at Weston-on-the-Green on 15 August 1972. He was treated at the John Radcliffe hospital, Oxford and later returned to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. The accident was caused by SUO James becoming entangled with the parachute of another parachutist during the course of his descent.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the accident during military training at Weston-on-the-Green on or about 13 June 1978 involving John Bradshaw.

Mr. Hanley: Private Bradshaw, a regular soldier on the military basic parachute course, died on 13 June 1978 as a result of the injuries sustained in an accident at Weston-on-the-Green. Private Bradshaw's parachute pack made contact with the door post of the aircraft as he exited, causing him to become entangled in the parachute rigging line and the canopy only partially to open. Private Bradshaw did operate his reserve parachute, but too late to allow its full deployment.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are required to lay their annual reports before Parliament.

Mr. Hanley: There is no formal requirement for any of my Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies to lay their annual reports before Parliament. The annual reports in respect of the Dartmoor steering group and working party and the Review Board for Government Contracts have, however, been placed in the Library of the House on previous occasions.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to produce annual reports.

Mr. Hanley: The following advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department are required in their terms of reference to produce an annual report:

(i) The Dartmoor Steering Group and Working Party;
(ii) The Defence Scientific Advisory Council and Committee;
(iii) The Review Board for Government Contracts;
(iv) The Independent Board of Visitors for the Military Corrective Training Centre.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the advisory bodies which he has set up in his Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993".

Mr. Hanley: No advisory non-departmental public body has been established by my Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993".

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which have a statutory basis.

Mr. Hanley: Only two of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department have a statutory basis. They are:

(a) The Dartmoor Steering Group and Working Party was established on a statutory basis under Command No. 6837.
(b) The Independent Board of Visitors was established in accordance with the Naval Detention Quarters Rules 1973 for the RN Detention Quarters, and the imprisonment and Detention Rules Army 1979 for Military Corrective Training Centres.

South Georgia

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision he has made for the spiritual guidance of the troops stationed on South Georgia.

Mr. Hanley: The South Georgia garrison is visited every six weeks by ships based in the Falkland islands. A padre regularly accompanies these sailings and services are held either aboard ship or on the island. Those based in South Georgia have a direct radio link to the Falkland islands and there is a resident service padre at Mount Pleasant as well as a Roman Catholic priest in Port Stanley. The Roman Catholic priest is an officiating padre to the British forces. Either of these can be contacted and consulted as necessary.

Arms Sales

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 June, *Official Report*, column *118*, if he will list *(a)* the countries to which arms have been sold over the last 12 months and *(b)* those countries to which arms have not been sold because of human rights abuse.

Mr. Aitken: United Kingdom defence statistics, table 1.11, contains information on United Kingdom exports of defence equipment by region—the 1994 edition will be published in mid-July this year—and the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms covers transfers of certain major arms by country. It has not been the practice of this or preceding Administrations to list all arms sales by country. It would be for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to address the question of human rights abuses.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the policy adopted by his Department towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Aitken: In accordance with the Government's policy of extending access to official information so as to improve public understanding of the way that Government works, the Ministry of Defence would normally expect to be able to publish consultants' reports in relation to its market testing and other "Competing for Quality" programmes except where there is a clear need to observe commercial confidences, the disclosure of which would damage the competitive position of companies or in-house bid teams.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has provided information on the cost of external consultancy support used in the

"Competing for Quality" programme over the period 1 April 1992 to 31 December 1993 to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee as part of its inquiry into the civil service. The Ministry's expenditure on external consultancy support in relation to the "Competing for Quality" programme for the period was £36,000. Expenditure figures for consultancy support contracts let for the current programme period, which ends on 31 September 1994, are not yet available.

TRANSPORT

Road Construction

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those stretches of motorway and trunk roads where porous asphalt has been used in construction; what cost benefit analysis he has carried out in relation to the full costs and savings of using porous asphalt in road construction and repair; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The question which is related to the use of porous asphalt is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 27 June 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State to list those stretches of motorway and trunk roads where porous asphalt has been used in construction; what cost benefit analysis he has carried out in relation to the full costs and savings using porous asphalt in road construction and repair. I have been asked to reply.

Porous asphalt has been laid as trials on A38 at Burton, M1 (South) Leeds and M6 north of Junction 18. These trials have been successful and led to the announcement on 28 July 1992 about the wider use of porous asphalt where conditions are suitable and it is cost effective. Porous asphalt will be used on 14 schemes in the Roads Programme, in due course.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received regarding the need for legislation to regulate wheel clamping.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The most recent representations in favour of legislation to regulate wheel clamping on private land have come from hon. Members in the House and in another place during proceedings of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. In response the Government have indicated that they are well aware of public concern about the excesses of some wheel clamping operators and that they are actively considering a range of solutions.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has held with the motoring organisations about the need for regulation or control of wheel clamping.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

During the public consultation exercise organised by my Department, the views of all interested parties, including the motoring organisations, were invited. The Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club both sent in their views.

Coastguard Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of the Coastguard Agency reception on the Royal Yacht Britannia to mark the launching of the agency; and who was invited to attend the event.

Mr. Norris: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord MacKay, hosted an official reception on board HMY Britannia, to mark the launch of the Coastguard Agency—Coastguard—and the Marine Safety Agency—MSA. The approximate cost was £1,600 to which may be added any necessary harbour dues.

In addition to eighty members of staff from Coastguard and MSA the guest list included 10 senior representatives of the Department of Transport, six local dignitaries and Members of Parliament, 13 officials of other United Kingdom and European Government Departments and the EC, 14 representatives of major suppliers and contractors to the agencies, and 87 representatives of shipping and maritime industries, services and associations.

Health and Safety, Christopher House

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report,* column *835,* what assessment he has made of whether all relevant EC directives/United Kingdom safety laws have been complied with during the move of his staff to St. Christopher house, London; and if all visual display unit work stations have had full risk assessments carried out.

Mr. Key: This question relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 28 June 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Key, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the move of Highways Agency staff to St. Christopher House.

You asked what assessment had been made of whether all relevant EC Directives/UK Safety Laws have been complied with during the move and if all VDU workstations have had full risk assessments carried out.

We have replaced light fitting in the new offices and replaced chairs at VDU workstations where necessary to comply with EC Directives.

We are continuing to carry out checks to ensure compliance with all the relevant EC Directives and UK Safety Laws following the move. A six-week assessment of the operation of new VDU workstations will be completed shortly.

Following completion of these checks, I am confident that we will fully meet all safety requirements.

I trust this information is helpful.

Road Schemes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many environmental impact assessments relating to road schemes are currently in preparation by his Department.

Mr. Key: This question relates to the operational matters of the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 29 June 1994:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS ON ROAD SCHEMES

The Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Robert Key, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary question about environmental assessments.

An environmental assessment is carried out for each scheme in the national roads programme and an Environmental Statement is published for those schemes which are likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

The environmental assessment commences at a very early stage in the development of a scheme. The Trunk Road in England 1994 Review identifies the schemes in the national road programme together with their priority.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what criteria his Department's pre-1985 environmental assessment of the M11 link road was based upon; and if he will place a copy of these criteria in the Library;

(2) if he will give details of the schemes considered by his Department for the proposed M11 link road which fully complied with EC directive 85/337/EEC; what was the environmental impact and cost of each; and if he will highlight the differences of each from the scheme approved;

(3) when, before the 1985 decision to authorise construction of the M11 link road, the environmental effects of the scheme were assessed; and if he will place in the Library a summary of the main factors and considerations taken into account;

(4) if he will list all aspects of the current M11 Link Road project that do not comply with European directive 85/337/EEC;

(5) why the EC standards set out in European directive 85/337/EEC were not considered by the subsequent public inquiries into the M11 link road; if it is policy that the rules of such inquiries should allow consideration of such relevant environmental factors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: These questions all relate to the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 link road, which is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, and I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 28 June 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Traffic has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Questions about the environmental assessment of and the application of Directive 85/337/EEC to, the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road since they are operational matters for the Highways Agency.

Prior to the 1985 decision to proceed with the Link Road environmental assessments were carried out in preparation for the Public Inquiry held in 1983. These were in accordance with current knowledge of methods of assessment at that time and made use of frameworks as laid down by the 1977 report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA). A copy of that report is already available in the House of Commons Library. I enclose a copy of the framework relating to the Link Road. The best available summaries of the main factors and considerations then taken into account are contained in the Inspector's Report and the decision letter of the Secretaries of State, copies of both of which I understand were sent to you at the time they were published since you gave evidence at the public inquiry.

Directive 85/337/EEC as implemented by section 105(A) of the Highways Act 1981 requires that where the Secretary of State has under consideration a proposed new highway he shall determine whether or not it requires an environmental assessment, and if so, that an Environmental Statement be published and the public be allowed to comment on it. The Secretary of State is required to consider the Environmental Statement and any opinion expressed on it and to publish his decision as to whether or not initiate the project. The European Commission has accepted that the Link Road project was begun before the Directive came into force in the UK and so the question of whether there are aspects of the Link Road which do not comply with the Directive, or of there being alternative schemes which do or do not comply, does not arise.

No references were made to the Directive at the 1987 and 1989/90 public inquiries into the Link Road because development consent for the project had already been granted. Consideration has always been given to environmental factors at public inquiries where it was relevant to do so.

I have also been asked to write to you in connection with your Parliamentary Question about the employment of Bray's Detective Agency, and since the reply concerns a number of road schemes I will send you a separate letter; however, for the sake of completeness of the record I will just mention here that the Link Road is one of those schemes.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what proportion of the Department of Transport road schemes in the last five years have not been recommended by public inquiry inspectors; and of those recommendations for rejection, how many have been endorsed by the Secretaries of State for Environment and Transport.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* As the information requested relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency, I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 28 June 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many and what proportion of the Department of Transport road schemes in the last five years, have not been recommended by public inquiry inspectors; and of those recommendations for rejection, how many have been endorsed by the Secretaries of State for Environment and Transport.

In the last five years, five schemes have not been recommended by public inquiry inspectors out of a total of 146 schemes which have been to public inquiry.

Of those five recommendations for rejection, the Secretaries of State for the Environment and Transport endorsed all but one small regional scheme. This has led to the removal of the schemes from the programme, or fresh orders being published.

In about 40 cases the modifications, recommended by the Inspectors, have been endorsed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department has paid in bonuses on road construction contracts; and how much his Department has received in penalty payments on road construction contracts, over the past five years.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 23 June 1994]:* As the information requested relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency, I have asked for the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 28 June 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how much the Department of Transport has paid in bonuses on road construction contracts and how much the Department has received in penalty payments on road construction contracts, over the past five years.

Incentive contracts involving bonuses and charges are used mainly for major maintenance. During the five year period 1989/90-1993/94, bonuses paid amounted to £18·3M and charges collected were £2M. These figures are based on contracts for

which final accounts have been settled and could ultimately be higher. A measure of the ratio of traffic delay costs saved to net bonus payments made is averaging around 5:1.

In addition, a total of £7·88M was paid out to two new construction contracts again for the economic advantages of having the new routes ready sooner, but of course the reason for paying bonuses is to reduce the time for the works and, therefore, the disruption caused to the travelling motorist.

Public Inquiry Cases

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office the number of cases taken to public inquiry over the last five years; and in those cases, how many licence holders had *(a)* the licences revoked, *(b)* licences suspended, *(c)* licences curtailed, *(d)* warnings issued and *(e)* no further action taken.

Mr. Key: Some of this information is contained in the annual reports of the Traffic Commissioners and licensing authorities, which have been placed in the Library of the House. The remaining information could be collated only at disproportionate expense.

Market Testing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to date of the market testing of *(a)* the records service in his Department and *(b)* the review currently being undertaken in the records policy and advice unit; and what is the total budget of the market test.

Mr. Norris: The records service market test has cost £60,466 to date. It has a budget of £85,000. The record policy and advice unit is examining how to improve record management standards and cost effectiveness throughout the Department, especially the review process before files are destroyed. The review process study has cost £7,300.

Port Reception Facilities

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ports that have independent contractors providing port reception facilities.

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency is currently undertaking a comprehensive survey to assess the quality of reception facilities provided in United Kingdom ports. The survey will indicate the extent to which independent contractors are used to provide facilities. Consideration will be given as to what useful information might be published when the results of the survey have been evaluated.

Unlicensed Light Goods Vehicle Operators

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office all cases of LGV operators being convicted as a result of being unlicensed for the last five years.

Mr. Key: A list of all cases of LGV operators convicted as a result of being unlicensed for the last five years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, the total number of cases prosecuted by the vehicle inspectorate for not possessing a goods vehicle operator's licence from April 1989 to March 1994 is 4,648. This figure is broken down as follows:

	Number
Scotland	278
North West	590
North East	919
South Wales	458
West Midlands	650
West	239
East	418
South East	1,096

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office the current estimated number of unlicensed LGV operators and the methods used to calculate this figure.

Mr. Key: We have no reliable estimates of the number of unlicensed LGV operators.

Road Toll Charges

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the regions of the United Kingdom of road toll charges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) on 24 January at column 78.

Oil Discharges

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government will take to ensure that cross-checks between oil record books and automatic printout of discharges will become a routine part of port state control inspections.

Mr. Norris: Port state control inspections already include the routine inspection of the oil record book. Further consideration is being given to the minimum extent of routine inspections by our partners in the Paris memorandum of understanding on port state control and the Government are seeking their urgent consideration of all of Lord Donaldson's recommendations on port state control.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the inconvenience caused to the travelling public of the non-interchangeability of tickets in the privatised rail companies.

Mr. Freeman: Ticketing arrangements are at present an operational matter for the British Railways board. For the future, the Secretary of State has instructed the franchising director to require franchisees to offer tickets which are inter-available between their services where he believes that the benefits of doing so will outweigh the likely benefits of price competition and service diversity. The franchising director is considering the implementation of this policy in consultation with British Rail and the rail regulator.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's policy towards the publication of external consultants' reports in relation to market testing.

Mr. Norris: Decisions on whether to publish reports by external consultants in market tests are taken on a case by case basis in the light of all the relevant circumstances, including commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in relation to market testing.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is given in the table. It includes all the items in the Department's competing for quality programmes, including contracting out and privatisation.

Expenditure to 31 March 1994

£000s, excluding VAT

	Cost
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency:	
CSL (support for in-house bids)	83
Touche Ross (support for client side and strategy advice)	152
Prime (support for client side and strategy advice)	215
Capita (support for in-house bids)	44
Driving Standards Agency:	
Shreeveport (support for in-house bids)	—
Basis (support for client side)	20
DVOIT:	
KPMG Peat Marwick (financial advice)	553
Theodore Goddard (legal advice)	317
Dibb Lupton Broomhead (legal advice)	227
Price Waterhouse (reporting accountants)	91
CSL (customer advice)	37
Ernst and Young (customer advice)	106
Transport Research Laboratory:	
KPMG Peat Marwick (study of options for privatisation and their feasibility)	78
Highways Agency:	
Touche Ross (advice on approaches to property management)	—
Central Transport Group:	
Shreeveport (support for in-house bids)	19
Basis (support for client side)	29
Admiral (support for client side)	6
Baker Tilly (support for client side)	26
Capita (support for client side)	18
Impact Plus (support for client side)	9

Pelican and Zebra Crossings

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the safety benefits of marking the road at the sides at pelican crossings; and what plans he has to introduce such markings.

Mr. Key: *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Pelican crossings are required to have the familiar ziz-zag markings. We are not at present considering the introduction of any further marking.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the relative safety benefits of pelican crossings and zebra crossings.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Research conducted by the Transport Research Laboratory has shown that although accident rates vary from site to site, the average rates for pelican and zebra crossings are similar overall.

London Underground

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish a table showing for each London underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number of (i) crimes of violence, (ii) robbery and (iii) other offences; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for each London underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number and percentage of escalators out of service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The information is not available in exactly the form requested. The table shows the number and percentage of escalators out of service between 1 January 1994 to 31 March 1994. From 1 April 1994 London Underground's target for escalator performance has been changed to measure hours out of service across the whole service day, and this is reflected in the figures quoted from 1 April. Data are not available for June 1994.

London Underground Limited: Escalators out of service

Line	*Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994*		*Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994*		*Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994*		*Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994*		*Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Hours*	*Per cent.*	*Hours*	*Per cent.*
Bakerloo	66	4·8	70	4·9	101	5·8	1,535	6·4	681	3·3
Central	227	8·4	284	10·0	459	13·5	4,418	10·9	3,404	9·0
District	44	5·5	44	5·2	60	6·0	10	0·9	2	0·2
Circle and Hammersmith	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	755	6·7	825	8·0
Jubilee and East London	77	33·8	111	46·3	53	18·4	595	16·9	254	7·8
Metropolitan	39	3·7	43	3·8	76	5·7	1,167	7·3	1,080	7·2
Northern	198	9·1	217	9·5	214	7·8	2,552	7·8	1,389	4·5
Piccadilly	195	11·9	197	11·5	203	9·8	1,874	7·6	2,338	10·0
Victoria	36	3·2	109	9·1	141	9·8	1,428	7·9	1,371	7·6

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing for each London underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number of incidents,

including cancellations, which resulted in a headway of more than 20 minutes; and how many of these were attributable.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* This information is not available in exactly the form requested. The table shows the number of major delays to service for each accounting period between January and May 1994. For the last three periods of the 1993-94 financial year, a major delay to service is defined as a delay of 20 minutes or more; since the beginning of 1994-95, only delays over 15 minutes have been measured by London Underground —in line with the current threshold for refunds under the LUL customer charter. No data are yet available for June 1994.

London Underground Limited
Attributable and non-attributable major train service delays

Line	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994	Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994	Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994	Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994	Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994	Total
Attributable delays						
Bakerloo	11	8	6	7	9	41
Central	27	24	27	43	44	165
District	6	3	7	12	4	32
Circle and Hammersmith	1	3	4	7	5	20
Jubilee and East London	1	1	3	7	2	14
Metropolitan	6	13	18	12	21	70
Northern	4	9	12	4	8	37
Piccadilly	9	3	4	20	15	51
Victoria	2	5	8	3	2	20
TOTAL	67	69	89	115	110	450
Non-attributable delays						
Bakerloo	4	1	0	3	4	12
Central	12	11	13	23	17	76
District	5	6	8	12	18	49
Circle and Hammersmith	5	4	9	14	10	42
Jubilee and East London	9	7	1	8	9	34
Metropolitan	14	14	17	25	24	94
Northern	13	10	13	14	9	59
Piccadilly	11	7	9	11	12	50
Victoria	3	5	1	7	9	25
TOTAL	76	65	71	117	112	441

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing for each London underground line, and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number and length of station closures *(a)* exceeding 20 minutes during the usual period for passenger travel, *(b)* exceeding one hour during the usual period for passenger travel, *(c)* exceeding one day, *(d)* exceeding one week and *(e)* exceeding one month which were attributable to (i) train breakdowns, (ii) signal failures, (iii) track or points failures, (iv) derailments or collisions, (v) leaves on the line, (vi) staff shortages, (vii) adverse weather conditions, excluding leaves on the line and (viii) bomb alerts.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* This information is not available in the form requested. The tables show station closures over 20 minutes but not more than one hour, and over one hour, caused by staff shortages (vi) and security alerts (viii)—this does not include station closures caused by individual suspect packages. Information on (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vii) is not collected by London Underground—it is extremely rare for a station to be closed for any of these reasons. Data are not collected in the form requested for closures in excess of one hour, and figures are not yet available for June 1994.

London Underground Limited: Station closures attributable to staff shortages

Line	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994		Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994		Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994		Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994		Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994	
	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour
Bakerloo	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Central	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	4	5
District	2	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	5	2
Circle and Hammersmith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jubilee and East London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0
Metropolitan	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Northern	0	1	0	0	2	0	3	1	3	1
Piccadilly	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Victoria	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1
Total	6	1	2	1	6	2	7	5	17	10

London Underground Limited: Station closures attributable to security alerts

Line	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994		Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994		Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994		Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994		Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994	
	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour	Over 20 minutes	Over one hour
Bakerloo	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	1
District	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Circle and Hammersmith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jubilee and East London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Metropolitan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Northern	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Piccadilly	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0
Victoria	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	1	4	3	4	2	3	0	1

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing for each London underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number and length of *(a)* attributable station closures, *(b)* non-attributable station closures, *(c)* exceeding 20 minutes during the usual period for passenger travel, *(d)* exceeding one hour during the usual period for passenger travel, *(e)* exceeding one day, *(f)* exceeding one week and *(g)* exceeding one month; which stations, closed during the period, have yet to be reopened; when each closed station will re-open; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The information is not available in the form requested. The tables show attributable and non-attributable station closures over 20 minutes but not more than one hour, and over one hour. No stations were closed for more than one day with the exception of Mornington Crescent on the Northern line, which has been closed by London underground for refurbishment and is not included in the tables. No data are yet available for June 1994.

London Underground Limited: Attributable and non attributable station closures exceeding 20 minutes

Line	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994		Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994		Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994		Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994		Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994	
	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable
Bakerloo	2	1	2	4	1	1	4	2	4	5
Central	3	6	5	11	3	11	5	5	5	16
District	2	0	2	5	3	7	0	5	5	7
Circle and Hammersmith	4	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Jubilee and East London	0	2	2	3	0	0	0	2	2	2
Metropolitan	3	8	3	5	3	9	1	12	1	6
Northern	1	5	0	4	4	5	6	9	6	4
Piccadilly	4	8	2	0	5	8	3	5	2	6
Victoria	0	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	6	4

London Underground Limited: Attributable and non attributable station closures exceeding one hour

Line	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994		Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994		Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994		Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994		Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994	
	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable	Attributable	Non attributable
Bakerloo	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Central	0	1	3	4	2	0	7	1	9	4
District	0	4	1	1	0	2	0	1	2	2
Circle and Hammersmith	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Jubilee and East London	0	1	0	2	0	1	3	0	1	1
Metropolitan	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	3	0	2
Northern	2	1	1	3	1	0	3	1	2	1
Piccadilly	0	1	1	0	1	6	2	2	1	4
Victoria	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0

A38

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he hopes to announce his Department's preferred route for the A38 trunk road improvement between Saltash and Trerulefoot.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* I expect to announce our preferred route for this scheme in the autumn.

Coastguards

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the numbers and responsibilities of the auxiliary coastguards assigned to each Coastguard Agency office.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* A total of 3,515 auxiliary coastguards are assigned to the Coastguard Agency. The table gives a breakdown by rescue centre of numbers of auxiliaries and their responsibilities.

District	Coastal Response Team	Operations Room Assistants	Other
Falmouth	240	31	4
Brixham	157	15	4
Portland	147	20	4
Shetland	114	17	2
Pentland	188	18	2
Aberdeen	165	15	3
Forth	99	9	2
Tyne Tees	115	15	2
Humber	145	18	2
Yarmouth	110	20	3
Clyde	155	12	2
Oban	171	15	1
Belfast	92	16	1
Stornoway	141	19	2
Solent	143	9	2
Dover	91	28	3
Thames	119	22	5
Swansea	222	23	3
Milford Haven	162	22	3
Holyhead	154	13	1
Liverpool	161	14	2
Total	3,091	371	53

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the frequency with which auxiliary coastguards have been called out in the year to July 1994; how many were called out; and what was the nature and location of the incident in each case.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The number of incidents to which auxiliary coastguards were called out during the period 1 July 1993 to 26 June 1994 totals 6,807. To provide details of the number of auxiliaries involved; nature and location of each incident would be of disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the annual budget of the Coastguards Agency is spent on the remuneration of auxiliary coastguards.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Out of the Coastguard Agency's budget for the financial year 1994-95 of some £49·9 million, 3 per cent. has been set aside for the cost of allowances paid to auxiliary coastguards.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of auxiliary coastguards pay and allowances *(a)* excluding and *(b)* including training costs in each coastguard region in 1993-94; and what it is projected to be in 1994-95.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The following is the information:

Regional Totals (a) and (b) Total Costs

Financial Year	Excluding Training £	Including Training £
Western Region		
1993-94	248,894	288,725
1994-95	221,285	275,000
Eastern Region		
1993-94	164,200	191,264
1994-95	162,889	189,720
North and East of Scotland Region		
1993-94	155,000	138,551
1994-95	181,261	159,551
West of Scotland and Northern Ireland Region		
1993-94	192,900	229,703
1994-95	184,592	235,674
South Eastern Region		
1993-94	230,817	245,716
1994-95	246,262	262,716
South Western Region		
1993-94	341,884	315,935
1994-95	382,824	358,700

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many auxiliary coastguard *(a)* patrol hours and *(b)* training hours are expected to be worked in the current year in each coastguard district and each coastguard region.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The following is the information:

Projected figures for financial year 1994-95

District	Patrol hours	Training hours
Western Region		
Swansea	2,438	5,520
Milford Haven	1,998	3,680
Holyhead	3,325	3,325
Liverpool	7,638	3,540
Total	15,399	16,065
Eastern Region		
Yarmouth	2,664	3,750
Humber	6,822	3,687
Tyne Tees	1,374	2,320
Total	10,860	9,757
North and East of Scotland Region		
Forth	550	2,200
Aberdeen	1,100	3,910
Pentland	900	3,700
Shetland	170	2,110
Total	2,720	11,920
West of Scotland and Northern Ireland Region		
Belfast	2,500	4,300
Stornoway	2,672	4,004
Clyde	468	6,807
Oban	1,728	3,414
Total	7,368	18,525
South Eastern Region		
Solent	12,600	5,000
Dover	5,000	3,500
Thames	4,835	1,878
Total	22,435	10,378
South Western Region		
Falmouth	8,770	7,075
Brixham	5,564	4,688

District	Patrol hours	Training hours
Portland	4,402	3,876
Total	18,736	15,639

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Overseas Aid

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the Government spent on assistance to developing countries and to countries in transition *(a)* in constant prices, *(b)* as a proportion of Government spending and *(c)* as a proportion of GNP in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992, taking account of (i) official development aid, (ii) international environment policy (iii) peace operations in developing countries and countries in transition, (iv) reception of asylum seekers, (v) aid to central and eastern Europe, (vi) subsidies on loans to developing countries, and (vii) other forms of non-ODA assistance to developing countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information is not available in the form requested. The best representation is shown in the table. Information on the value of peace operations and reception of asylum seekers is being provided in response to separate questions tabled by the hon. Member.

United Kingdom gross official flows to developing countries ([1] [2])

	Cash terms £ million	(a) Constant prices (1992) £ million	(b) Per cent. of General Government Spending	(c) Per cent. of GNP
Official development assistance				
1980	866	1,790	0·83	0·43
1990	1,563	1,744	0·73	0·33
1991	1,901	1,985	0·83	0·38
1992	1,977	1,977	0·78	0·38
of which: Loans/Subsidies[3]				
1980	74	154	0·07	0·04
1990	6	7	0·00	0·00
1991	24	25	0·01	0·00
1992	30	30	0·01	0·01
Other official flows				
1980	281	580	0·27	0·14
1990	386	431	0·18	0·08
1991	346	361	0·15	0·07
1992	252	252	0·10	0·05
of which: Loans/Subsidies[3]				
1980	278	574	0·27	0·14
1990	386	431	0·18	0·08
1991	346	361	0·15	0·07
1992	252	252	0·10	0·05

[1] This excludes assistance to countries of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, peace operations in developing countries and the cost of asylum seekers.
[2] Note that gross official flows do not include loan repayments.
[3] Includes interest stabilisation and subsidised loans.

Other United Kingdom net official flows of assistance

	Cash terms £ million	(a) Constant prices (1992) £ million	(b) Percent of general government spending	(c) Percent of GNP
United Kingdom official bilateral assistance to central and eastern Europe				
1980	0	0	0·00	0·00
1990[1]	69	78	0·03	0·01
1991	21	22	0·01	0·00
1992	28	28	0·01	0·01
United Kingdom net official bilateral assistance to former Soviet Union				
1980	0	0	0·00	0·00
1990	0	0	0·00	0·00
1991	4	5	0·00	0·00
1992	30	30	0·01	0·01

	Cash terms £ million	(a) Constant prices (1992) £ million	(b) Percent of general government spending	(c) Percent of GNP
United Kingdom multilateral assistance to CEE/FSU				
1980	0	0	0·00	0·00
1990	0	0	0·00	0·00
1991	160	167	0·07	0·03
1992	135	135	0·05	0·03
Environmental protection[2]				
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1990	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1991-92	108	112	0·05	0·02
1992-93	124	124	0·05	0·02

n/a=Not available.

[1] Includes contribution towards currency stabilisation fund for Poland of about £62 million.

[2] Please see PQ 152 for an explanation of these figures. Figures for 1991-92 and 1992-93 are given in constant 1992-93 prices.

Development Aid

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much in cash terms and constant prices the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on development aid to developing countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Expenditure details requested are as follows:

United Kingdom Gross Official Development Assistance to Developing Countries[1]

Official Development Assistance	Cash Terms £ million	Constant Prices (1992) £ million
1980	866	1,790
1990	1,563	1,744
1991	1,901	1,985
1992	1,977	1,977

[1] Note that gross official flows do not include loan repayments.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether British aid projects have been affected adversely by ethnic clashes in Kenya; and what representations he has made on these matters to the Kenyan Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No British aid projects have been directly affected by the clashes. We have registered our concerns over the violence. We are supporting victims of the clashes by funding the programme launched jointly by the Government of Kenya, the United Nations development programme, donors and non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the good governance issues that he takes into account in considering aid projects for Kenya.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our programme aid, in Kenya as elsewhere, depends not only on economic reform but on a conducive political environment, with effective action to improve open and accountable government, including dealing with corruption, reducing tribal tensions and enhancing press freedom. We are, through our project aid —for example, support for the legal sector—seeking to enhance the processes of transparency and accountability.

International Environment Protection

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much in cash terms and constant prices the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on international environmental protection.

Mr. Lennox Boyd: Figures are not available for 1980 and 1990. Preliminary data derived from a pilot statistical analysis of bilateral projects show that expenditure on projects that had environmental protection as an objective was £108 million in 1991-92 and £124 million in 1992-93, in cash terms. In constant 1992-93 prices, this represents £112 million and £124 million respectively.

The analysis covers approximately 57 per cent. of all bilateral expenditure. It does not include multilateral aid.

Central and Eastern Europe

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much in cash terms and constant prices, the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on aid to central and eastern Europe.

Mr. Lennox Boyd: Expenditure details requested are as follows:

£ million

Year	Cash terms	Constant prices (1992)
United Kingdom net official bilateral assistance to central and eastern Europe		
1980	0	0
[1]1990	69	78
1991	21	22
1992	28	28
United Kingdom net official bilateral assistance to former Soviet Union		
1980	0	0
1990	0	0
1991	4	5
1992	30	30
United Kingdom multilateral assistance to CEE/FSU		
1980	0	0
1990	0	0
1991	160	167
1992	135	135

[1] Includes a contribution towards the Currency Stabilisation Fund for Poland of approximately £62 million.

Developing Countries (Loans)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much in cash terms and constant prices the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on subsidies on loans to developing countries *(a)* included in ODA expenditure and *(b)* not included in ODA expenditure.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Details of the value of interest stabilisation and subsidised loans to developing countries, are as follows:

United Kingdom gross official flows to developing countries[1]

Interest Stabilisation and Subsidised Loans	*Cash Terms*	*Constant Prices (1992) £ million*
(a) Included in Official Development Assistance[2]		
1980	74	154
1990	6	7
1991	24	25
1992	30	30
(b) Not included in Official Development Assistance[3]		
1980	278	574
1990	386	431
1991	346	361
1992	252	252

[1] Note that gross official flows do not include loan repayments.
[2] This comprises grants for interest subsidies included in Associated Financing packages and bilateral loans.
[3] This comprises subsidies to national private exporters and investors, loans to national private investors and other bilateral securities and claims.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 June 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his Department's involvement with TECs.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department has sought information and guidance from Central London's training and enterprise council in connection with initiatives such as investors in people and NVQ national standards.

Public Trust Office

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Public Trust Office is to be established as an agency.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Further to my answer of 28 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *794,* to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), I am pleased to confirm that the Lord Chancellor shall establish the Public Trust Office as an executive agency on 1 July 1994. I will arrange for a copy of the Public Trust Office's framework document to be placed in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Victim Compensation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that compensation awarded by the courts to victims of criminal acts is always paid.

Mr. Maclean: Courts already have substantial powers of enforcement for use when an offender fails to pay promptly a compensation order or other monetary penalty. These include means inquiry and attachment of earnings or social security benefits, seizure and sale of property and imprisonment. Decisions about which enforcement sanctions to use in a particular case are for the courts. Magistrates courts are responsible for the collection and enforcement of compensation orders in individual cases. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has recently circulated fresh guidance on how enforcement procedures might be improved.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many discretionary life sentence prisoners do not qualify as such for the purposes of the Criminal Justice Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the case of prisoners sentenced before 1 October 1992, section 34 of the 1991 Act applies where the Secretary of State so certifies under the transitional provisions of the Act. One prisoner was not so certified.

The application of section 34 to prisoners sentenced on or after 1 October 1992 is a matter for the courts. Information on the number of cases where section 34 has not been applied is not available.

The status of prisoners serving a discretionary life sentence who have been transferred to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983 is currently subject to appeal. Information on the number who may or may not qualify for section 34 provisions could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people sentenced to detention at Her Majesty's pleasure under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 are currently detained; how many of these are now adults; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The latest available information is for 30 April 1994. On that date there were 250 persons, of whom 61 were aged under 21 and 189 were adults, held in England and Wales who had been sentenced to detention at Her Majesty's pleasure under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mandatory life sentence prisoners have been told their tariff dates following the decision of the House of Lords in the case of R. *v.* Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Doody and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As at 27 June 1994, 966 mandatory life sentence prisoners had been informed of their tariff in accordance with the arrangements set out in my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), on 4 November 1993, *Official Report,* columns *376-78.*

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases the Home Secretary has increased the tariff period recommended by the judiciary in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of cases in which the tariff has been set higher than the period recommended by either the trial judge or the Lord Chief Justice is as follows:

Year	*Number*
[1]1990	57
1991	32
1992	19
1993	4

[1]Figures available only for August-December.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been permanently or temporarily transferred to Northern Ireland following the interdepartmental working group's review of the provisions for the transfer of prisoners between United Kingdom jurisdictions in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 1 December 1992, four prisoners have been permanently transferred to Northern

Ireland and nine prisoners have been temporarily transferred. In addition, four prisoners previously temporarily transferred have been granted further periods of temporary transfer in Northern Ireland.

Police Authorities

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in respect of the age limit of 70 years for members of the new proposed police authorities; and if he will list them.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have received four letters from hon. Members specifically on this subject since the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill entered the House of Commons. Information relating to letters from hon. Members received before this date, and to correspondence from the general public, could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in respect of the timetable for people who wish to apply for membership of the new proposed police authorities; and if he will list them.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Electoral Law and Procedure

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now announce the results of his Department's review of electoral law and procedure.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer the hon. Member to a question from the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 4 March, *Official Report,* column *933.* My officials have now met representatives of the local authority associations and will report to me in due course on the outcome of the review.

Euthanasia

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take in respect of doctors who have intentionally ended the life of a patient.

Mr. Maclean: Any person who intentionally kills another person is liable to prosecution under the criminal law for murder. The investigation and prosecution of offences are matters for the police and Crown Prosecution Service.

May Report

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the report of Sir John May's inquiry into the convictions of the Guildford Four will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: As I announced on 16 May, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I have received Sir John May's report of his inquiry into the case of the Guildford Four who were convicted in 1975 of murder and conspiracy to cause explosions following the Guildford public house bombings in October 1974. Paul Hill and Patrick Armstrong were additionally convicted of murder and conspiracy to cause explosions in connection with the Woolwich public house bombing in November 1974. Their convictions were quashed by the Court of Appeal on 19 October 1989 following the decision of the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) to refer their case to the Court of Appeal under the provisions of section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968.

This report is being published today in response to an Order of the House for a Return. We wish to thank Sir John, and all those who assisted him throughout his inquiry, for the care and thoroughness with which he and they have examined the circumstances surrounding the convictions of the four and the subsequent consideration given to representations made on their behalf to my Department that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred.

In his report, Sir John examines how the Guildford and Woolwich public house bombings were investigated by Surrey constabulary and the Metropolitan police respectively, the circumstances which led to the Four's arrest, and to the arrest of others in connection with the offences, and reviews the basis of the decision to prosecute the four. He then details the admissions made by the four in various statements to the police and sets out their respective explanations for why these were made. The alibis of the four for the Guildford bombing are examined in detail, as are the alibis of Paul Hill and Patrick Armstrong for the Woolwich bombing. Sir John has also considered the conduct of the trial, the interviews given by three of the four to the police following their convictions, the disclosure of forensic correlation evidence at the trial, the arrest of the Balcombe street gang in December 1975 and the admissions made by some of them and by one of their associates with regard to the Guildford and Woolwich bombings. Sir John has also examined the events which preceded the four's appeal against conviction in 1977, the conduct of that appeal, the role of Home Office Ministers and officials in considering representations alleging that a miscarriage of justice had occurred in their case and finally the 1989 appeal which resulted in their convictions being quashed.

This was a very serious miscarriage of justice. The Government are determined that lessons are learned from such cases and applied effectively in the future. This is why we set up Sir John's inquiry and, more recently, the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice.

Sir John's report contains a number of serious criticisms about the handling by the police of the original investigation, for example the number of arrests made, the inadequate basis for many of those arrests and the treatment accorded to those held in custody. However, it also acknowledges the many changes which have already taken place with regard to police powers and practice following the enactment of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the resulting improvements achieved through the regulation of such matters as the interrogation of suspects, the time for which they can be detained in custody before being brought before the courts and their treatment while in custody under the codes of practice issued under the 1984 Act.

The report refers to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, in connection with the number of people arrested during the early stages of the police investigations of the Guildford and Woolwich bombings and concludes that, in relation to many of them, the police exceeded the powers available to them under the Act. Sir John draws attention to the

safeguards provided by PACE and expresses concern that there are greater risks of injustice in terrorist cases where some of the PACE safeguards do not apply.

I have noted those points very carefully but think it important to stress that whatever early difficulties were encountered in using the Act's provisions, those do not reflect upon the way in which the Act is used now. The police are now very much better informed about the way in which their powers should be exercised. Detailed guidance has been issued and is supplemented by regular briefings. All persons detained under the PTA in England and Wales are covered either by the statutory safeguards in PACE or by the specific safeguards which have been built into PTA itself. In particular, PACE code of practice C, covering the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by police officers applies to all persons in police detention including those arrested under the PTA.

The allegations of misconduct and ill treatment by police officers reported by Sir John have been the subject of appropriate action, including disciplinary action, wherever sufficient evidence has been available. Since the 1970s, considerable improvements have been made to the way in which complaints against the police are conducted. If similar allegations were to be made now, the police investigation would be likely to be undertaken by another police force under the supervision of a member of the Police Complaints Authority. The Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill, currently before Parliament, will provide scope for police disciplinary action to be quicker and less legalistic.

Sir John's report notes the prosecution's failure to disclose before the trial expert witness statements and an alibi statement that might have been helpful to the defence; but he attributes those failures to regrettable human error rather than to any deliberate attempt to pervert the course of justice or to any failure of the criminal justice system itself. He also recognises that in certain other respects the prosecution team made fuller disclosure than its legal obligations required. It is worth noting that since the Guildford four's convictions, the law and practice on disclosure has developed in such a way that it should be much less likely that such a situation could occur.

In reviewing the Home Office's role in this case, Sir John concludes that the criteria which successive Home Secretaries have used to determine whether a case should be referred to the Court of Appeal are sound in law and logic and provide no grounds for criticism. I welcome his further conclusion that, within the limits imposed by those criteria, the Home Office investigated the representations it received with care and efficiency. We seek constantly to apply the lessons to be learned from cases of this kind and we shall go on doing so. In the years since the Guildford case was referred my Department has developed a broader approach to cases that come to it for review, in particular by being ready where appropriate to investigate cases more widely than the specific points raised in representations, and by being ready to start up inquiries where a case comes to attention without necessarily waiting for representations to be made.

The Government have accepted the Royal Commission's recommendation that a new independent body should be established to take over my responsibilities for reviewing such cases in the future, and I am currently considering the responses we have received to the discussion paper which we issued last March.

Clearly, much has already been done to correct past mistakes and failings, but the Government are anxious that the criminal justice system in England and Wales should be as effective and efficient as possible in investigating crimes and prosecuting and convicting the guilty—and only the guilty.

The Royal Commission made 352 recommendations for changes to be made to improve the criminal justice system in this country. Almost half of those have now been accepted by the Government, and some are included in the current Criminal Justice Bill before the House of Lords.

The Government attach very great importance to the proper administration of justice and will take whatever action may be necessary in the future to safeguard against miscarriages of justice.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what is his Department's involvement with TECs.

The Attorney-General: The Law Officers' departments have not been involved formally with TECs.

Prosecuting Authorities

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the prosecuting authorities.

The Attorney-General: The review team, headed by Mr. John Graham, which examined the handling of serious fraud has now delivered its report. Copies of the report and of annexes 1 to 5 and 7 have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Annex 6 of the report has not been published. It is a summary of some recent and current cases in both Departments which should, in line with the general handling of such material, be retained within the prosecuting departments.

The review team undertook a comprehensive study of the arrangements for the investigation and prosecution of criminal fraud cases in the Serious Fraud Office and the Crown Prosecution Service, examining in particular relative work loads and the criteria for allocating cases between the two Departments and the organisation and management of investigation and prosecution work in the two Departments. It took account of the role of the police in fraud investigations and of the DTI in company matters generally. The review did not constitute the feasibility study into the possibility of a merger between the Serious Fraud Office and the fraud investigation group of the Crown Prosecution Service suggested by the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, but the review team was asked in its terms of reference to carry out its work in the light of the Royal Commission's recommendation 36.

I am grateful to Mr. John Graham and his team for the work which they have done. The report identifies management and organisational issues which need to be addressed by the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office and on which the review team has made helpful recommendations. In many cases, the issues had already been identified within the prosecuting Departments and improvements set in hand. The vast majority of the remaining recommendations are accepted and I have asked the Director of Public Prosecutions and the director of the

Serious Fraud Office to take these forward urgently, consulting the police where appropriate. A joint vetting committee is being established to ensure all complex and serious fraud cases are handled by the prosecuting department which has the most suitable powers and resources for the particular case. The copies of the report placed in the Libraries are accompanied by a response jointly prepared by the Serious Fraud Office and the Crown Prosecution Service, which deals briefly with each recommendation in so far as it affects each Department.

The report concludes that there is a range of cases which can be satisfactorily handled only through the multi-disciplinary approach to investigation and prosecution recommended by the fraud trials committee chaired by Lord Roskill. There are, however, some cases which can be described as serious or complex but which do not require that approach. The review team noted that there was some overlap between cases allocated to the fraud investigation group of the Crown Prosecution Service and to the Serious Fraud Office. It identified some potential benefits which could flow from the establishment of a single organisation which would deal with all serious or complex fraud cases but handle them on a differential basis. The review team saw scope for arrangements under which some cases would be both investigated and prosecuted by the new organisation while other cases would only be prosecuted by it. The review team made no recommendation as to whether any new organisation should constitute part of an enlarged Serious Fraud Office or Crown Prosecution Service but identified advantages and disadvantages associated with each option.

Further consideration will be given to the question of merger in conjunction with the studies I announced on 6 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *60,* to establish whether executive agency status was appropriate for the Serious Fraud Office and the Crown Prosecution Service. Ministers will wish to take a final decision about a possible merger in the light of recommendations arising from those studies.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on BSE.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government's Chief Medical Officer continues to advise that there is no evidence that humans can contract Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease from an animal with BSE. There has been no significant increase in the incidence of CJD in the United Kingdom over the years 1985 to 1993. Also, the Chief Veterinary Officer advises me that the incidence of BSE among cattle in the United Kingdom continues to fall as a result of the control measures that have been put in place. There has been a particularly sharp decline in the incidence of the disease in cattle less than five years old.

A large number of monitoring and research studies have been undertaken into BSE since 1988, and these continue. They include a BSE pathogenesis experiment which has involved the feeding of calves with a high dose of BSE-infected brain tissue. Some preliminary positive results from the BSE pathogenesis experiment will be published shortly in the "Veterinary Record". The experiment, begun in December 1991 and still continuing, is designed to investigate the biological pathways through which the disease develops in cattle.

These results show that it is possible to transmit BSE to laboratory mice from intestines taken from young cattle when fed a substantial dose of brain material known to contain BSE. It is not surprising that BSE has been found in those tissues, which scientists have always considered a likely route for feedborne infection. The relatively short period in which the infectivity has shown up, in one case six months after being fed the BSE dose, does however raise the issue of whether calves up to six months should continue to be exempt from the ban on the use of specified bovine offals—SBOs—of which the intestine is one.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I have sought the advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee—SEAC—and have considered this with the Chief Medical Officer. The Committee noted the reduced risk of feedborne infection following the ban on feeding ruminant protein to ruminants such as cattle, which was introduced in 1988, and the continuing lack of evidence of significant maternal or horizontal transmission. They concluded that the theoretical risk of infection of man from food from infected calves is minuscule. They advised that the continuing results of the experiment should be carefully monitored to confirm this basic conclusion.

I have carefully considered this advice in consultation with my right hon. Friends the other Agriculture Ministers and the Secretary of State for Health. We have concluded while the assessment of SEAC and of the CMO is that any risk to health is minuscule, the Government's policy of extreme caution in relation to BSE requires us to ensure that the tissues in which infectivity might potentially occur are removed from the human and animal food chain. We accordingly propose to extend the scope of the existing ban on the use of specified bovine offals to the intestines and thymus of calves under the age of six months. An exception will be made for calves which die before two months of age which cannot be used for human consumption under other existing legislation. The necessary orders will be duly made with the minimum of delay. This action is purely precautionary and will be kept under review.

I intend to give particular thought to the possible scope for alternative safeguards less restrictive than those now in place in the case of cattle from herds which have not been exposed to BSE. Such an approach is now becoming appropriate as the epidemic continues to decline.

I should repeat that the Chief Medical Officer continues to advise that there is no evidence whatever that BSE causes Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease and, similarly, not the slightest evidence that eating beef or hamburgers causes CJD.

I am making available, in the House Library, a background document giving more detailed information about the experimental results and the advice of SEAC, the CMO and the CVO.

I am informing the EU Commission and the EU Scientific Veterinary Committee of the action being taken.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many individual payments have been made to farmers as compensation for the slaughter of cows infected with BSE; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: It is not possible without disproportionate costs to break down the total amount paid out in BSE compensation into a list of individual payments made to specific farmers. However, the total number of cattle compulsorily slaughtered as BSE suspects since August 1988 and up to 28 June 1994 on which compensation would have automatically been paid is 122,171 in England, 6,455 in Scotland and 13,603 in Wales. There are also occasions where, because compulsory slaughter has not taken place, compensation is not automatically paid. In those circumstances, each individual case is assessed on its merits and ex-gratia payments may be awarded.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amount of compensation is given to farmers for each cow slaughtered because of BSE; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Compensation paid to farmers for an animal compulsorily slaughtered as a BSE suspect is an amount equal to 100 per cent. of either the market value of the animal or the monthly indicative market price—IMP—whichever is the lower figure. Where subsequent laboratory examination does not confirm that the animal was affected by BSE, compensation is an amount equal to 100 per cent. of the market value of the animal or 125 per cent. of the monthly IMP, whichever is the lower figure. The monthly IMP is a weighted average of prices of Friesian and Holstein cows, heifers in milk and in calf, and barren dairy cattle taking into account the age distribution of cattle slaughtered as BSE suspects in the month. The IMP for July will be £890.

Cormorants

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations her Department has received from angling organisations and angling clubs in England and Wales, and from individual anglers, about cormorant predation; what action is being taken in response; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The following individuals, organisations and clubs have expressed their concern to the Ministry about cormorant predation.

G. R. Hemus, Esq.
P. M. Hobson, Esq.
F. Sandison, Esq.
Major D. J. Shaw
Aramstone Fishery
Atlantic Salmon Association
Blue Circle Northfleet Works Coarse Angling Club
British Field Sports Society
Duncan Cameron and Sons Ltd.
Ernest Cook Trust
Furness Fishing Association
Hampton Bishop Fishery
Harris and Sheldon Group Ltd.
Hereford and District Angling Association
Kingfisher Angling and Preservation Society
Lancashire Fishery Conservation Association
Luggs Mouth and Lower Carrots Fishery
Orpington and District Angling Association
Ouse Angling Preservation Society
P. M. Fisheries
Salmon and Trout Association
Sam Davies Angling Syndicate
Severn Fisheries Consultative Council
St. Helens Angling Association
Wantsum Angling Association
Wye Salmon Fishery Owners Association

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Ministry is a licensing authority for the killing of cormorants where evidence of serious damage to a fishery has been provided. The Ministry considers each application on its merits and is advised by Agricultural Development Advisory Service, the Ministry's wildlife advisers. In addition, the Ministry consults English Nature. Together with other Government Departments, conservation bodies and fisheries interests such as the Salmon and Trout Association, the Atlantic Salmon Trust, the Country Landowners Association and the British Field Sports Society, the Ministry is reviewing its research and development programme on piscivorous birds to inform policy better.

Dogs

Sir David Madel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes she is planning to the regulations that apply to the bringing into the United Kingdom of dogs from other European Union countries; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* The Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) (Amendment) Order 1994 has been made today. This order implements the derogation negotiated by the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland for the importation of commercially traded dogs and cats under the live animals trade directive (92/65/EEC), commonly called the "balai".

Under the amendment order, from 1 July 1994, commercially traded dogs and cats will be able to be imported into the United Kingdom from other member states without quarantine if they comply with all the following strict criteria. They must:

be the subject of a commercial trade;
come from a registered holding;
on the day of dispatch show no signs of contagious disease;
have an implanted microchip identifying the animal with a unique number which will also be shown on the accompanying certification (the importer will be required to supply a suitable reader with each import);
have been born and kept on the holding of origin since birth with no contact with wild animals;
in the case of dogs, have been vaccinated against distemper;
be transported by an authorised carrier;
have vaccination and health certificates signed by an Official Veterinary Surgeon;
have been vaccinated against rabies when at least 3 months old and at least 6 months prior to export (with boosters if appropriate);
have been blood tested not less than 30 days after vaccination to show that the vaccination has been effective; and
have the movement notified in advance to the local Divisional Veterinary Officer.

The order also includes powers to check the identity of the imported animals and their vaccination status. These stringent new procedures replicate our quarantine arrangements in many respects and provide sufficient safeguards to protect our rabies-free status.

PRIME MINISTER

EC President

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make it his policy not to agree to any change in the procedure for choosing a President of the European Commission which would directly or indirectly remove or restrict the requirement for consensus;

(2) if he will make it his policy not to agree to the appointment as a member of the European Commission any person who has not made it clear that he is opposed to any further transfer of power from Whitehall and Westminster to Brussels and Strasbourg;

(3) if he will make it his policy not to agree to the appointment as President of the European Commission of a person with known federalist views;

(4) if he will make it his policy not to agree to the appointment as a member of the European Commission of any person who has advocated the transfer of responsibility for monetary and exchange rate policy to the EC and its institutions.

The Prime Minister: I shall continue to insist that the President and other members of the Commission are appointed by common accord of the Governments of the member states, as the treaty requires. I shall consider candidates for the Presidency of the Commission on their merits.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 June.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what response Her Majesty's Government have given to lawyers of the two Libyan suspects of the bombing of Pan Am 103 who have made representations to Her Majesty's Government regarding the statement of Youssef Chaabane in a Beirut court that he planted the bomb.

The Prime Minister: We have received no such representations.

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill

Mr. Berry: To ask the Prime Minister when the Government decided to oppose the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill at Report stage.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 June 1994]:* The Government made clear their doubts about the Bill as a whole at Second Reading and on other occasions, but we had also indicated that we would see what, if any, parts were appropriate to take further. In the event, debates during Committee confirmed our doubts, and the Government explained the reasons why they were unable to support the Bill at Report stage on 6 May.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many contracts and for what total sum were let out by his Department and agencies for which it is responsible to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KPMG Peat Marwick, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* Price Waterhouse, *(e)* Arthur Andersen, *(f)* Touche Ross, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* Robson Rhodes and *(i)* Pannell Kerr Forster for (i) privatisation, (ii) market testing, (iii) management advice, (iv) accounting, (v) audit, (vi) consultancy and (vii) other services in (1) 1980 to 1983, (2) 1984 to 1987, (3) 1988 to 1991 and (4) 1992-93.

Mr. Waldegrave: Information is not available for the period January 1980 to December 1983. From 1984 on, the available information on the number and value of contracts let to these consultancies by my Departments and their predecessors is as follows:

Period	*Contracts let*	*Costs (£000)*	*Firms*[1]
1984 to 1987	6	216	(a), (d), (e), (f)
1988 to 1991	9	177	(a), (b), (d), (f)
1992-93	56	2,723	(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f)

Note: To preserve commercial confidentiality contracts have not been identified under specific categories. The costs of contracts have been aggregated and are attributable to the firms indicated[1].

[1] (a) Coopers and Lybrand
(b) KPMG Peat Marwick
(c) Ernst and Young
(d) Price Waterhouse
(e) Arthur Andersen
(f) Touche Ross
(g) Grant Thornton
(h) Robson Rhodes
(i) Pannell Kerr Forster

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to consult prior to legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish their response to advice supplied by them.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to publish their advice to Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which have a statutory base.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, sponsored by the Cabinet Office, was set up by an Order in Council which resulted from the Abuses of Honours Act 1925.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the advisory bodies which he has set up in his Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993."

Mr. Waldegrave: "Public Bodies 1993", published in December 1993, lists non-departmental public bodies in existence at 1 April 1993. The following advisory non-departmental public bodies have been established by my Department since then:

Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force
Technology Foresight Steering Group

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are required to lay their annual reports before Parliament.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to produce annual reports.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to review the need to bring executive agencies of Government fully within the scope of competition regulation and fair trading control.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: As the citizens charter second report 1994 explains, Crown immunity is being progressively reduced as legislative opportunities arise. In the meantime, Crown bodies are expected to behave as if they were bound by regulations. This applies to executive agencies, which are required to behave in accordance with the principles underlying competition law.

Receivers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to proposals under which accountants acting as receivers, administrators and liquidators would be required to publish information about their affairs.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I am not aware of any proposals under which accountants acting as receivers, administrators and liquidators would be required to publish information about their affairs.

Insolvency Regulator

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to proposals for appointing an independent regulator for insolvency.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have considered proposals for the appointment of an independent monitor in individual insolvencies. I am anxious to encourage creditors to make use of the powers available to them to supervise insolvencies and I do not believe that the additional cost of such an independent monitor is justified.

However, the Government welcome the setting up of the joint institute monitoring unit by professional bodies whose members are engaged in insolvency practice. This will provide users of insolvency procedures with a basic level of assurance as to professional standards and regulatory compliance.

Intra-EEC Trade

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish figures corresponding to those in the December 1993 issue of "Business Monitor MM20" for total trade in tables 3 and 4 for intra-EEC trade together with those for 1992.

Mr. Needham: Information for 1993, including intra-EC trade, was published by the Central Statistical Office in tables 2 and 3 in the December 1993 issue of "Business Monitor MM20A", "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom with the World (including data for countries within the European Community: Intrastat)". Information for 1992 was published in "Business Monitor MA20", "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom". Both publications are available in the Library of the House.

External Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table corresponding to table F2 of the 1991 "Supplement to the Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" showing separately the weighted average, excluding the United Kingdom, against the EC Six and the other listed countries.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is given in the table.

Main manufacturing countries' exports of manufactures: unit value indices 1985 = 100
Weighted average excluding United Kingdom

	Non-EC[1]	EC(6)
1975q1	64	83
1975q2	65	83
1975q3	63	78
1975q4	64	77
1976q1	64	77
1976q2	66	78
1976q3	66	80
1976q4	68	83
1977q1	68	85
1977q2	69	86
1977q3	70	88
1977q4	73	91
1978q1	75	96
1978q2	78	98
1978q3	83	102
1978q4	85	108
1979q1	87	112
1979q2	88	112
1979q3	91	121
1979q4	92	126
1980q1	93	132
1980q2	96	131
1980q3	99	134
1980q4	101	129
1981q1	101	120
1981q2	100	113
1981q3	100	109
1981q4	104	116
1982q1	104	113
1982q2	103	112
1982q3	101	107
1982q4	100	107
1983q1	102	110
1983q2	101	106
1983q3	100	102
1983q4	102	102
1984q1	102	103
1984q2	103	103
1984q3	100	98
1984q4	99	95
1985q1	97	91
1985q2	98	96
1985q3	101	104
1985q4	105	112
1986q1	108	122
1986q2	110	124
1986q3	114	131
1986q4	115	135
1987q1	119	145

	Non-EC[1]	EC(6)
1987q2	122	147
1987q3	122	145
1987q4	126	155
1988q1	129	156
1988q2	130	155
1988q3	127	145
1988q4	131	155
1989q1	131	152
1989q2	128	148
1989q3	128	149
1989q4	130	157
1990q1	132	167
1990q2	132	169
1990q3	137	177
1990q4	142	187
1991q1	141	183
1991q2	136	163
1991q3	136	162
1991q4	139	174
1992q1	125	—

Weighted average excluding United Kingdom

Year	Non-EC[1]	EC (6)
1975	64	80
1976	66	80
1977	70	88
1978	80	101
1979	90	118
1980	97	131
1981	101	115
1982	102	110
1983	101	105
1984	101	99
1985	100	101
1986	112	128
1987	122	148
1988	130	153
1989	129	152
1990	138	175
1991	134	170

[1] Non-EC comprises: Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America, Canada and Japan.
Note: Manufactures is defined as SITC sections 5-8.
Data is only available back to 1975.

Updated and rebased to 1990=100 data will be available from 8 July 1994 on the central shared database, which can be accessed from the Library.

Trade and Industry Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing by standard industrial trade classification two-digit division the industries whose share of the United Kingdom market has increased *(a)* since 1973 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing by SITC two-digit division the industries whose share of exports by the main manufacturing countries has declined since 1985.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is given in the table.

SITC divisions for which the United Kingdom share of main manufacturing countries' exports decreased between 1985 and 1991.

SITC Code	Description
00	Live animals
01	Meat, meat preparations
05	Vegetables and fruit
06	Sugar, surgical preparations, honey
07	Coffee, tea, cocoa, spices
09	Miscellaneous edible products etc.
12	Tobacco, tobacco manufactures
21	Hides, skins, furskins, raw
22	Oil seed, oleaginus fruit
24	Cork and wood
28	Metalliferous ore, scrap
29	Crude animal, vegetable material
32	Coal, coke, briquettes
33	Petroleum, petroleum products
34	Gas, natural, manufactured
43	Animal, vegetable fats, oils, nes
51	Organic chemicals
52	Inorganic chemicals
53	Dyes, colouring materials
55	Essential oils, perfume, etc.
57	Plastics in primary form
59	Chemical materials nes
61	Leather, leather goods
63	Cork, wood manufactures
65	Textile yarn, fabric, etc.
66	Non-metallic, mineral manufactures
69	Metals manufactures, nes
72	Special industrial machinery
73	Metal working machinery
74	General industrial machinery nes
77	Electrical mch. apparatus, parts nes
81	Prefabricated buildings, fittings etc.
82	Furniture, bedding, etc.
84	Clothing and accessories
87	Scientific equipment nes

Postal Services

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will make a statement about his plans for the postal service.

Mr. Heseltine: I am today publishing a Green Paper on the future of postal services. It sets out the challenges and opportunities facing the Post Office businesses and the Government's response to them.

We have one of the best postal services in the world. The Post Office and its employees have responded well to the challenges of recent years, but enormous changes are taking place in the markets in which the Post Office operates. If the Post Office businesses are to seize the opportunities and respond to increasing competition, while providing further improvements in the service to customers, then more fundamental changes are required. In its recent report on the future of the Post Office, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry said:

"What is undoubtedly true is that the Post Office cannot be retained in its present form".

The Government agree. The status quo is not an option.

As I made clear in my statement to the House on 19 May, the Government's consideration of those issues is subject to three vital and non-negotiable commitments. These are the maintenance of a nationwide letter and parcel service with daily delivery to every address in the United Kingdom, a uniform and affordable structure of prices, and a nationwide network of post offices.

The Government propose to retain the current structure of the nationwide network of post offices, keeping Post

Office Counters in the public sector. It believes that the present partnership between Post Office Counters, at the hub of the network, and the private sector business people who run sub-post offices—which represent over 19,000 of the nearly 20,000 post offices—works well and should continue. The Government intend to maintain and strengthen the business and the network by allowing them to take on new areas of work, building on their existing activities. It also proposes that there should be significant investment in the automation of many of their clerical routines, in particular benefit payments.

As for Royal Mail, the Government accept that, to survive and prosper, the business needs greater commercial freedom to seize new opportunities and to meet greater competitive challenges in the communications market. The Green Paper sets out the options for achieving this that the Government are considering.

The Government's preferred option is a new partnership arrangement under which the Royal Mail, together with Parcelforce, would be jointly owned by the Government, the public, sub-postmasters and employees, with the Government retaining a stake of 49 per cent. of the shares. Any further sale of shares by the Government would be subject to parliamentary approval. Under this option, the Government would guarantee the three non-negotiable commitments through legislation.

The Green Paper discusses the issues of regulation and competition in the postal sector, and describes how greater competition and choice would be progressively introduced for customers. It also discusses consumer representation, the position of the Post Office's employees and sub-postmasters and VAT, as well as the royal associations which the Post Office has traditionally enjoyed.

The Government are inviting comments on the Green Paper by 30 September.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether consideration has been given to the impact of paragraph 6.4.2 of chapter 3 of the European Green Paper on post as it relates to the privatisation of *(a)* the Royal Mail and *(b)* Parcelforce; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The EC Green Paper has no legislative force and therefore has no impact on the legal position. The section referred to by the hon. Member does indicate that the Commission intends to review the competitive interface between public postal services and those of other operators in respect of VAT. The Government have also addressed this issue in their own Green Paper, published today. The Commission has not, however, brought forward any proposals in this sector. Public postal services, such as the universal services which will under any outcome continue to be provided by Royal Mail and Parcelforce, therefore remain free of VAT.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people are in current full-time employment with Parcelforce in Stoke-on-Trent; how many of them are currently in temporary contracts; how many of them are currently employed as casual workers; what are the recruitment procedures used in respect of *(a)* permanent, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* casual work; and if he will give details of different rates of pay and conditions of employment in respect of (i) permanent, (ii) part-time and (iii) casual work.

Mr. McLoughlin: Parcelforce's staffing and recruitment practices are commercial matters for the business.

EC Sixth VAT Directive

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the European Commission about amending article 13(a)(1)(a) of the EC sixth VAT directive, whereby public postal services are exempt from VAT.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Commission has indicated in its Green Paper on postal services its intention to review the VAT treatment of postal services, and this has arisen in discussions with them. The Commission has not, however, brought forward any proposed amendment.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the European Commission about the interpretation of article 13(a)(1)(a) of the EC sixth VAT directive as it relates to the privatisation of Parcelforce.

Mr. McLoughlin: My officials, together with those of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, have had a number of contacts with the Commission of the European Communities about that provision of the sixth directive. The Government are satisfied that, under the directive as it stands, privatisation would not mean the imposition of VAT on the universal letter and parcel services provided by Royal Mail and Parcelforce. The Government have made it clear that under any option they finally adopt, stamps will continue to be free of VAT.

Invisible Exports

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the share of invisible exports which go to other EC countries; and if he will make a statement about the significance of invisible exports to the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Needham: EC member states accounted for 35 per cent. of the United Kingdom's invisible credits in 1992, the latest year for which an analysis by country is available. Total invisible credits accounted for nearly half of United Kingdom's overseas earnings in 1993, and represented 18 per cent. of "money GDP".

Asil Nadir

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration was given to evidence from the trustees before the Official Receiver's decision not to apply to the courts for a suspension before the automatic discharge in November of the bankruptcy of Mr. Asil Nadir; and on what grounds this decision was reached.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Official Receiver's application under section 279(3) of the Insolvency Act 1986 in the case of Mr. Asil Nadir—Suspension of automatic discharge—was lodged in court on 5 May 1994 and is due to be heard on 1 July 1994.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column *225*, if he will publish a table indicating the downtrend of manufacturing employment in the developed world between 1979 and 1994.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The information requested is published in the OECD's "Labour Force Statistics (1971-1991)", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Business Statistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the rate of new business formation and failure in *(a)* Fife and *(b)* Scotland on a quarterly basis over the last three years.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* Not all the figures requested are available. The best guide to trends in the number of business starts and closures comes from the annual VAT data; quarterly data are not available. Figures for the years 1990 to 1992 are published in "VAT Registrations and Deregistrations, County and District Analysis", 1980 to 1991, and 1992 editions. Both these documents are available in the Library of the House or online via NOMIS.

Quarterly figures for company insolvencies in Scotland were last published on 6 May in the Association of British Chambers of Commerce's "Business Briefing", which is available in the Library of the House. Equivalent figures for Fife are not available.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Initiative

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what his estimate is of *(a)* current job vacancies and *(b)* job vacancies to be covered by the new training initiative.

Miss Widdecombe: In May 1994, the seasonally adjusted number of unfilled vacancies at United Kingdom jobcentres stood at 147,000. It is estimated that, nationally, jobcentre vacancies represent about one third of all unfilled vacancies.

Modern apprenticeships are training places; high-quality training, typically taking about three years to complete. In five years' time there could be over 150,000 apprentices in training if employers respond, as I am sure that they will.

Disabled People (Employment)

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what sum his Department is currently spending on promoting the employment of disabled persons; and what the figures were in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: People with disabilities have access to all the Department's employment and training programmes, and benefit from all the Department's initiatives on promoting employment opportunities. Expenditure on disabled people within mainstream programmes cannot be disaggregated from overall programme expenditure. The following table contains such information as is available on programme expenditure on specialist programmes and initiatives for disabled people only and relates to expenditure from 1986-87 onward. It is not possible to provide figures for the years before 1986-87 without incurring disproportionate cost.

Employment Department Expenditure on Promoting People with Disabilities

	£000
1986-87	90,451
1987-88	94,181
1988-89	98,465
1989-90	[1]116,764
1990-91	128,892
1991-92	142,807
1992-93	[2]160,011
1993-94	163,651
1994-95	[3]174,461

Notes: All yearly totals are cash figures. The figures are based on Employment Department and Employment Service (ES) published appropriation accounts, except the 1993-94 and 1994-95 figures, which are based on the ES supply estimates. They do not include any administration costs or Supported (formerly sheltered) Employment research and development costs.

[1] From and including 1989-90, totals include expenditure on services for people with disabilities which, in previous years, were not separately identifiable.

[2] Totals for 1992-93 and 1993-94 include expenditure on advertising and publicity which, in previous years, were not separately identifiable.

[3] Includes resources transferred from the revenue support grant of the Department of the Environment, Scottish and Welsh Offices for local authority expenditure on Supported Employment.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will announce the membership of the National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities following its reconstitution.

Mr. David Hunt: I am appointing seven new members and reappointing 10 existing members to the National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities for a period of three years from 1 July 1994. The chairman of the Council, Mr. Alan Smith MBE, FIPM, FBIM, FinstD, has also been reappointed.

The members of the council are:

Members appointed after consultation with organisations representing employers

Ms J. T. Mellor
Mr. P. H. Newman
Mr. R. C. Spoor OBE, RD, DCL, DL, FCA

Members appointed after consultation with organisations representing workers

Mrs. G. M. Davies RGN
Ms R. Donaghy
Mr. R. D. Exell

Other Members

Professor I. W. Bruce BSocSc, CIMgt
Mr. W. G. Davies
Dr. S. Duckworth MSc., LRCP., MRCS
Dr. A. L. M. Fingret MBBS., MFOM
Sir P. Large CBE
Mr. H. W. Massie OBE
Mr. T. V. F. Papé BSc
Ms S. Scott-Parker
Mr. T. R. Sermon FCIS
Mr. I. N. Sneddon
Ms F. D. Worman FIPM

Job Finders' Grant

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to extend the job finders' grant to areas other than the pilot areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The job finders' grant pilots are being evaluated. No decision has been taken to extend them to other areas.

Trade Union Membership

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what account was taken in preparation of the Government's White Paper on competitiveness (Cm 2563) of the paper by Professor Beenstock et al on the United Kingdom economic recovery in the 1930s published in Bank of England Panel Paper No. 23; and if he will publish a table giving figures comparable to their Chart 42 for trade union membership as a percentage of employees in employment of the period since 1964.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Today's circumstances are very different from those of the 1930s. The trend in trade union membership from 1964 to 1992 is presented in the following table:

Trade union membership as a percentage of employees in employment in the United Kingdom 1964-1992

Year	Per cent.
1964	45
1965	45
1966	44
1967	45
1968	45
1969	46
1970	50
1971	50
1972	51
1973	51
1974	52
[1]1975	54
[1]1975	53
1976	55
[2]1977	57
[2]1978	57
1979	57
1980	58
1981	56
1982	55
1983	53
1984	51
1985	50
1986	49
1987	48
1988	46
1989	44
1990	44
1991	43
1992	42

Note:

Union membership totals are the end of year figures.

[1]Discontinuity:—Thirty-one organisations previously regarded as trade unions are excluded from 1975 onwards because they failed to satisfy the statutory definition of a trade union in the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act, 1974. To help provide a link in the series, two sets of figures are given for 1975. The first gives the figures on the original basis for comparison with earlier years, while the second gives estimates for comparison with later years.

[2]The employees in employment estimates are at June of each year between 1964 and 1977, and at December of each year between 1978 and 1992.

British Telecom

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information has been given to his Department by BT plc about the expected number of redundancies of each grade of employee for the year April 1994 to March 1995.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information given to the Department under the statutory redundancy handling provisions is provided in confidence.

Redundancies

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will now introduce legislation requiring companies to consult representatives of their employees on redundancies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Employers have been required since 1975 to consult recognised trade unions about proposed redundancies. The Government are presently considering what changes need to be made to those arrangements following a recent ruling by the European Court of Justice.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the percentage of the total work force working under 20 hours per week for *(a)* 1984 and *(b)* 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Estimates from the labour force survey for Great Britain show that 11·7 per cent. of employees and self-employed people usually worked fewer than 20 hours per week in their main job in spring 1984, compared with 13·6 per cent. in winter 1993-94.

Training

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by what process his Department monitors companies which provide training or initiate quotations as training providers; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils contract directly with training providers. The TEC operating agreement between the Department and TECs sets out the monitoring requirements placed on them in a number of areas to ensure that their providers give value for money and that the use of public funds is managed in a robust and efficient manner.

Cathedral Employment Enterprises

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what help, financial or other, his Department is prepared to offer Cathedral Employment Enterprises; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department does not contract directly with providers for training—other than the Employment Service for job clubs. Therefore, it is not in a position to give financial support to Cathedral Employment Enterprises. The ES currently has around £20,000 owing to Cathedral and is waiting to be advised by Cathedral's accountants of new arrangements for paying this figure. Both the ES and South Thames training and enterprise council, with which Cathedral had substantial contracts, gave Cathedral's invoices priority treatment to ease its cash-flow problems. All three TECs that currently have contracts with Cathedral, and the ES, are making alternative arrangements to help those trainees affected.

HEALTH

Bullying (NHS Staff)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps her Department intends to take to eliminate the bullying of national health staff at work.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for individual national health service employers, who will want to take account of the general Whitley council agreement on harassment at work, copies of which are available in the Library.

South West Thames Region

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will detail for each financial year since 1990-91 the resource allocation, per head of population, for each health district in the old South West Thames region.

Mr. Sackville: The per capita spend for 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 is shown in the table. Comparisons of those per capita spend figures need to be treated with caution. First, not all the expenditure covered arises from population related activities. Secondly, crude populations do not reflect differences in age structure or relative health care need. Those differences feature in the formulae used to inform the main allocations made to district health authorities. Thirdly, before 1991-92, DHAs were funded for their catchment populations and not for their resident populations.

District health authority	*1990-91 (£)*	*1991-92 (£)*	*1992-93 (£)*
North West Surrey	278	341	369
West Surrey	182	268	285
South West Surrey	346	361	359
Mid Surrey	396	372	407
East Surrey	361	379	402
Chichester	266	336	377
Mid Downs	233	305	314
Worthing	229	332	355
Croydon	280	342	365
Kingston and Esher	325	373	407
Richmond and Twickenham	237	413	425
Wandsworth	702	534	569
Merton and Sutton	279	386	410

Source: Expenditure – 1992-93 annual accounts of health authorities (England)
Population – Mid year population estimates.

Figures for 1993-94 and 1994-95 are not yet available.

Community Care Policy

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the cost of providing public-funded residential care for people in England who have returned to, or remained within, the community under the community care policy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The policy of replacing long-stay hospitals when appropriate with a range of health and social services in the community has been pursued by successive Governments over many years. It is not therefore possible accurately to estimate either the total or the current cost of residential care solely for people discharged from long-stay hospitals and those who might in other circumstances have entered such hospitals.

IGF-1

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the extent of a link between IGF-1 levels in milk and serious gastro-intestinal disorders in humans; and what research her Department has undertaken into the link.

Mr. Sackville: IGF-1 is a naturally occurring hormone in humans. Human blood normally contains 10 times the concentration of IGF-1 as that found in cows' milk. Any contribution to this from ingestion of milk would be minimal.

The Department has undertaken no research into the link between IGF-1 levels in milk and serious gastro-intestinal disorders in humans.

Doctors and Dentists (Working Hours)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many junior doctors and dentists in each region in England are contracted for more than *(a)* 83 hours a week or *(b)* 72 hours a week in on-call posts.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 31 March 1994, the returns from the 14 English regional task forces on junior doctors' hours were as follows:

Region	*(a) Contracted for more than 83 hours a week*	*(b) Contracted for between 73 and 83 hours a week in hard-pressed on-call posts*
Northern	0	453
Yorkshire	2	978
Trent	0	342
East Anglian	0	254
North West Thames	1	419
North East Thames	0	674
South East Thames	5	392
South West Thames	4	478
Wessex	0	323
Oxford	0	263
South Western	1	128
West Midlands	0	529
Mersey	0	317
North Western	0	974
Total	13	6,524

Research Units

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, columns *240-2*, if she will list for each of the 13 research units which have been subject to peer review, the date of the site visit, whether the report of the review has now been discussed with the unit, whether a decision has been made about the future of the unit and the nature of the decisions which have been made.

Dr. Mawhinney: The dates of site visits are shown in the table:

Research Unit	*Site Visit Date*
	Completed
Childhood Cancer Research Group	October 1991
Medical Care Research Unit	October 1992
National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit	June 1993
Social Medicine and Health Services Research Unit	July 1993

Research Unit	Site Visit Date
Centre for Primary Care Research	July 1993
Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit	October 1993
National Institute for Social Work	October 1993
Clinical Operational Research Unit	November 1993
Social Policy Research Unit	January 1994
Thomas Coram Research Unit	March 1994
Personal Social Services Research Unit	April 1994
Dartington Social Research Unit	April 1994
Centre for Health Economics	(planned for July 1994)

With the exception of the centre for health economics, where the visit has yet to take place, the conclusions of the site visit teams are now being prepared.

Latest developments regarding some of the units visited early in the programme are as follows:

National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit
Announcements have been made about the appointment of a new Director and the appointment process is currently in train.

Centre for Primary Care Research
Won a competitive tender for new Research Centre funding. I announced this on 21 February 1994.

Social Medicine and Health Services Research Unit
A new Director has been appointed and discussions are taking place about a new programme of work.

Discussions are currently taking place with the directors of the cancer screening evaluation unit, the childhood cancer research group, the medical care research unit and the clinical operational research unit.

The remaining units work in personal social services. They were visited and reviewed later in the cycle of visits. In respect of the National Institute for Social Work, the report of the reviewing panel has been sent formally to the institute's director. The review team's report on the social policy research unit has also been completed and will shortly be sent formally to the unit's director. Reports on the remainder are nearing completion. Decisions on those units will be taken as soon as possible.

Grants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of grant which could have been claimed by each local authority, and how much was claimed by each authority, for *(a)* community care special transitional grant, *(b)* projects working with people with HIV-related illness and *(c)* for other health and community care projects, in each year for which such grants were claimable.

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 6 May 1994]:* The community care special transitional grant was allocated to local authorities on the basis of a formula for both 1993-94 and 1994-95 and not on the basis of claims made. Details of the allocations are set out in special grant reports 6 and 7—HC 404 and HC 405—for 1993-94 and special grant report 10—HC 218—for 1994-95, copies of which are available in the Library.

From its introduction in 1989-90 to 1993-94, local authorities were invited to submit bids for the HIV/AIDS specific grant without reference to indicative allocations but subject to an agreed national total. Details of the bids submitted and grants awarded will be placed in the Library. For 1994-95, local authorities were invited to submit expenditure plans which were assessed against indicative allocations of grant based on information provided to the Department by the Public Health Laboratory Service and available for the first time on the distribution of AIDS cases by local authority area. Details of the indicative allocations and grants awarded will be placed in the Library.

Two other specific grants support health and community care projects: they are for services for people with a mental illness and for people who misuse alcohol and drugs. For each year since its introduction in 1991-92, local authorities have been invited to bid for the mental illness specific grant against indicative allocations issued by the Department of Health. Details of the indicative allocations and the grants awarded will be placed in the Library. From its introduction in 1991-92, the alcohol and drugs specific grant has been allocated on the basis of open-ended bids invited by the Department of Health from local authorities supporting voluntary sector projects. Information about the original bids made could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of the successful bids made by voluntary organisations for each year since 1991-92, together with details of the local authority supporting each project, will be placed in the Library.

TREASURY

Public Borrowing

12. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the economy of maintaining the current level of public borrowing.

Mr. Portillo: Had we not taken effective action to put public finances on a sound and sustainable basis, confidence would have been severely damaged and the recovery weakened.

Profit Share Tax Relief Schemes

13. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what analysis he has made of the efficacy of profit share tax relief schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: An evaluation of the tax relief for profit-related pay has been commissioned by the Inland Revenue, the Department of Employment and the Treasury, and is currently under way.

Alcohol and Tobacco (Illegal Imports)

14. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce the volume of illegal imports of alcohol and tobacco.

Sir John Cope: The law prescribes severe penalties of up to seven years' imprisonment and unlimited fines for smuggling. Customs and Excise have deployed specially assigned staff and intelligence directed checks are used to seek out illicit goods. When cases are detected, the contraband is seized and in some cases the vehicle, too. Prosecutions have resulted in fines and custodial sentences.

Growth Forecast

15. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast for growth during the current financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are now facing the prospect of sustained growth and low inflation. I am forecasting that the economy will grow by 2¼ per cent. in both 1994 and 1995.

Labour Statistics

17. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what economic conclusions he draws from the most recent unemployment figures.

Mr. Portillo: Unemployment has now fallen by over 300,000 since December 1992, much sooner and much faster than most people expected. In part that reflects the improved labour markets flexibility resulting from our supply-side reforms.

VAT (Average Payments)

18. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much an average family paid per week in VAT in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1993; and what he estimates this figure will be in 1994.

Sir John Cope: A couple with two children on average earnings paid VAT of £12·95 per week in 1979-80, in 1993-94 prices, and an estimated £19·48 per week in 1993-94. Since 1978-79, the real take-home pay of such a family has risen by £83 per week.

Taxation Changes

19. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on changes in taxation.

Mr. Dorrell: I have received a wide range of representations on changes in taxation.

Income Tax

20. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many more people will pay income tax this year than last year; and what proportion of these are pensioners.

Mr. Dorrell: The total number of income tax payers is expected on increase by 300,000 in 1994-95, mainly because of increases in income. About 70,000 of the increase in the respect of taxpayers aged 65 and over.

24. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Government income tax policies over the last 15 years.

Mr. Dorrell: Since 1979, Government policy has been to reduce marginal rates of income tax, whenever it has been prudent to do so, to sharpen incentives to work and create wealth.

28. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates will be raised by the Treasury in *(a)* 1994-95, *(b)* 1995-96 and *(c)* 1996-97 from the freezing of personal income tax allowances.

Mr. Dorrell: That information was given in table 4.1 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1994-95" published on 30 November 1993.

Value Added Tax

21. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total revenue raised by value added tax in the last financial year; and what will be the likely value added tax take in the current financial year.

Sir John Cope: Net VAT receipts by Customs and Excise amounted to £39,248 million in 1993-94. The forecast for 1994-95 is £43,400 million.

Training

22. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much Government investment in training will be cut next year.

Mr. Portillo: The Government's spending plans for the years 1995-96 to 1997-98 will be announced at the time of the Budget in the normal way.

Film Industry

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the need to review the tax regime to encourage film producers to use British facilities.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received no recent representations.

Public Sector Investment

25. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much public sector investment will change over the next three years, as measured by public sector asset creation; and if he will estimate by how much public sector investment has changed in real terms since 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Public Sector Asset Creation, 1989-90 to 1996-97

£ billion

	Cash	*Real*[1]
1989-90	29·2	34·8
1990-91	28·8	31·8
1991-92	28·5	29·5
1992-93	29·0	29·0
1993-94	29·3	28·4
1994-95	28·8	26·8
1995-96	29·3	26·3
1996-97	29·8	26·1

[1] 1992-93 prices

German GDP

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the revised OECD estimate in respect of the change in the level of German gross domestic product in 1994.

Mr. Nelson: The OECD, along with most forecasters, has revised upwards its estimates of the growth in German gross domestic product for 1994. The OECD now expects growth in Germany to be 1·8 per cent. in 1994. That compares with its projection for United Kingdom growth in 1994 of 2·8 per cent.

VAT (Standing Charges)

27. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received over the adding of value added tax on standing charges for gas and electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: I have received a large number of representations, both from right hon. and hon. Members and from members of the public. I have made it clear on a number of occasions that the standing charge has always been regarded as part of the consideration for a single supply of fuel and power. If it were not, it would have been liable to VAT at the standard rate since 1 April 1973 and would be liable at that rate now.

Royal Family (Tax Returns)

29. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements he has made for the market testing of the office dealing with the tax returns of the Royal Family.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue's current market testing programme consists of typing, secretarial, information technology and ancillary support services. If such services were to be transferred to a private sector organisation, the Inland Revenue would remain responsible for continuing to ensure proper standards of privacy and confidentiality for all citizens. Confidentiality is not a bar to market testing, but the Inland Revenue would need to be sure that an outside contractor could replicate existing security procedures and conditions.

Manufacturing Sector

30. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will next meet the Engineering Employers Federation to discuss ways in which he could stimulate the country's manufacturing sector.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans at present to meet the Engineering Employers Federation. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary attended a presentation by it on 11 May and spoke to its council on 15 June. My officials have had regular contacts with the EEF over the last year.

Income Statistics

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average equivalised income at current prices for 1979 and 1992 of (i) single-parent households, (ii) two-parent households with *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children and *(c)* three or more children, and (iii) other households with children, by quintile groups of households; and if he will make a statement on the unavailability of such information at other than current prices.

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *238*, for the figures for 1979. The figures for 1992 are in the table.

Average equivalised disposable income by household type and by quintile groups

£ million

1992	*Quintile groups of all households ranked by equivalised disposable income*					
Household type	*Bottom*	*2nd*	*3rd*	*4th*	*Top*	*All households*
One adult with children	5,275	7,816	11,106	15,892	27,471	8,449
Two adults with one child	4,635	8,140	11,416	15,883	30,236	16,117
Two adults with two children	4,875	8,231	11,297	15,837	28,369	13,899
Two adults with three or more children	4,924	8,085	11,190	15,877	27,524	11,052
Other households with children	5,137	8,092	11,377	15,834	24,362	11,578

The quintile groups are based on all households ranked by equivalised disposable income. The difference between the average equivalised disposable income of household types within each quintile group is affected by the composition of the quintile group and the distribution of the incomes of the different household types within the quintile group.

Those figures are not strictly comparable over time because of changes in classification of both income and taxation and because of changes in the family expenditure survey.

The information is taken from an analysis published in "Economic Trends" which examines the differential impact of taxes and benefits on households at different income levels in the given year. It provides five measures of income and appropriate deflators have not been developed across the range of measures. For the particular measure of disposable income, a possible deflator would be the all-items retail prices index, excluding local taxes.

EEC Membership Costs

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now publish a White Paper setting out the effect on *(a)* jobs, *(b)* the balance of payments and *(c)* food prices in the United Kingdom of joining the EEC.

Mr. Nelson: No. I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 17 March, *Official Report*, column *822*, and the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 18 May, *Official Report*, column *470*, in answer to very similar questions from the hon. Member.

Price Increases

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of production industries as described in tables 7.1, 9 and 10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" for which he has evidence of price increases in excess of that required to provide a return on capital sufficient to enable the industry to maintain its United Kingdom assets at current rates of exchange.

Mr. Nelson: Price indices of the output of manufacturing industry are published in table 18.6 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics". Information on required rates of return on capital is not available.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account is taken of the level of employment in the Government's policy on increases in the money supply.

Mr. Nelson: It is the role of monetary policy to deliver low inflation. Decisions are based on an assessment of a range of indicators including the money supply and estimates of spare capacity in the economy. The minutes of the monthly monetary meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England set out the basis for monetary policy decisions and are now published.

Investment

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal measures he is taking to encourage investment in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government are taking a number of measures to encourage investment:

(i) in his November Budget last year my right hon. and learned Friend announced three tax measures to attract equity investment into unlisted companies: the Enterprise Investment Scheme, Venture Capital Trusts and an extension of Capital Gains Tax reinvestment relief;

(ii) the Government now make a clear distinction between capital and current spending in the fiscal projections. This recognises that capital spending generates a future stream of benefits which current spending does not;

(iii) the Private Finance Initiative will lead to more and better capital projects by allowing the public sector to draw on private sector management skills and financial resources.

More generally, the Government have delivered the best possible economic environment for investment: low inflation, low interest rates and a clear strategy to reduce the PSBR, all of which provide the key to sustainable growth.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the cost of local government reform in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Portillo: We have received a number of representations on the cost of local government reform from interested parties, including the hon. Member.

English Wine

Mr. Lord: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the level of tax on English wine; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Each year, before making his budget decisions, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reviews the level of taxation on alcoholic beverages, including wine. Consideration is given to a wide range of social, economic and health factors as well as the revenue effect.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Benefits

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *402*, if he will set out the severance benefits including pension, life insurance policies or grants that are available to Members of the European Parliament which are not available to hon. Members.

Mr. Newton: As I said in my answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *402*, resettlement grants and pensions are available to Members of the European Parliament and Members of this House on the same basis.

There are differences in the arrangements for the reimbursement of expenses and other allowances. Payments of this kind to Members of the European Parliament are the responsibility of the European Parliament, but I am not aware of any payments from that source which relate to severance.

1 Parliament Street

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee how many meals have been sold each day since the opening of Bellamy's Club dining room at 1 Parliament street; how the takings differ from those of the former coffee lounge; and what representations he has received from staff now excluded from the two rooms.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The conversion of the Clubroom, on a trial basis, was undertaken in response to representations from Members. Numerous representations have been received from staff now excluded from the two rooms, but it is as yet too early to form an opinion regarding the long-term viability of the new Clubroom. I understand that the Director of Catering Services intends to review the operation of the Clubroom after Christmas. The Catering Committee will wish to be informed of the results of that review and will then also consider the representations which it has received.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee how much the recent adaptions to the coffee bar and lounge in the Parliament street buildings has cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I understand from the Director of Catering Services that the new servery counters purchased for Bellamy's Clubroom cost £25,849, paid from funds available in the Refreshment Department trading account. No costs have been incurred by the House of Commons works vote or administration vote. The servery counters have been specifically designed for flexibility of use and can, if necessary, be used for other purposes in the Refreshment Department.

Visually Impaired Visitors

Mr. McMaster: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what information is available in Braille to blind and visually impaired people visiting the House; if he will review how the availability of this information is advertised in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: Braille guides, which include a tactile map of the Line of Route, are available from the Serjeant at Arms and braille guides to the Galleries are available from the Admissions Order Office and Doorkeepers on request. These guides are described in the leaflet "Arrangements for the Assistance of Disabled Visitors", which is available from the Sergeant at Arms Office and reception desks in the outbuildings. The current inquiry by the Accommodation and Works Committee into ways of improving access for disabled people visiting the Palace includes consideration of the provisions made for blind and partially sighted visitors.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the role of the Organisation of African Unity's observer mission in Burundi: what countries contribute personnel; and how the British Government have responded to its appeal for financial and logistical support.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The OAU mission is to assist in restoring democratic institutions, rebuilding confidence and stabilising the situation in Burundi. Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon, Tunisia and Egypt have contributed personnel.

We have no plans to contribute towards this initiative. The United Kingdom has already committed $1 million to the United Nations Trust Fund for Liberia and we anticipate that others, who did not contribute to this fund, will take the lead in Burundi.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the French Government about its proposed military mission in Rwanda; and what assessment he has made about France's suitability for military involvement after its past involvement in that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have supported the French initiative. A military mission as authorised by Security Council resolution 929 has a specific and restricted humanitarian mandate.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what terms and conditions he has put on his support for the French initiative in Rwanda.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Under the terms of SCR 929, France is required to co-ordinate its initiative closely with the United Nations, and to complete its mission within two months.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Kenya about ethnic clashes in the country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Ethnic clashes are a major concern. We raise the issue regularly with the Kenyan authorities at all levels.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what human rights issues he has raised with the Government of Kenya in the past year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Human rights issues such as ethnic clashes and press freedom feature prominently in our regular discussions at all levels with the Kenyan Government.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the European Union about the issues involved in continued support for Kenya.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We discuss regularly with our EU partners all issues relevant to continued support for Kenya.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the role of the Kenyan Government in ethnic clashes; and what representations he has made on this subject.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are concerned at continued ethnic clashes in Kenya and regularly make our concerns known to the appropriate authorities. We were recently more reassured by the Government's speedy action to contain violence in the Rift valley.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent British oil interests in the Ogoni area of Rivers state in Nigeria are being damaged by political unrest; and what representations he has made to the Nigerian Government on this issue.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I understand that the political unrest in the Ogoni area has led to a significant reduction in output from the Shell/AGIP/Elf joint venture with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. The oil companies concerned have made representations to the Nigerian Government for a greater share of the oil revenue to be expended in the oil producing area.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking further to improve the United Kingdom's relationship with Nigeria.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We value our relationship with Nigeria and maintain close contact with the Nigerian Government through our high commission. We look forward to progress towards a restoration of democratic civilian government, which would permit closer relations to develop.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the possible impact on the United Kingdom, its investors, and its exporters, if further economic sanctions were to be imposed limiting trade with Nigeria; if he will make it his policy to oppose the introduction of any such sanctions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We and our European Union partners have introduced a number of measures directed at Nigeria's military Government to demonstrate our strong support for a return to democratic civilian rule. It is not the intention that such measures should harm economic relations.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the plight of the Ogoni people in the Rivers state of Nigeria; what view he has formed on this; and what representations he has made to the Nigerian Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received a number of representations on this matter from hon. Members and

from the public. The problems in Rivers state are rooted in a complex set of issues. The Nigerian Government are fully aware, through our contacts with them, of the importance that we attach to human rights.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Nigerian high commissioner; and what was discussed at that meeting.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Nigerian high commissioner to London briefly at the diplomatic banquet on 17 June. A wide range of issues are discussed in the course of regular diplomatic contacts with the high commissioner.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to the announcement by the Nigerian Government of its federal government political programme; and what steps he is taking to assist the work of the local government caretaker committee, the national constitutional conference, and other bodies established by the Nigerian authorities to prepare the ground for further movement towards democracy.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave her on 28 June, *Official Report*, columns *525-26*. We are not familiar with the work of the local government caretaker committee. We do, however, welcome the start of the national constitutional conference, and hope to see firm progress towards democratic, civilian rule.

Diplomatic Entertaining Costs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of entertaining foreign guests at each British high commission situated in each other Commonwealth country in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Expenditure on official entertainment in 1993 at British high commissions overseas was £1,343,538. It is our practice not to publish how this is divided between posts.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of entertaining foreign guests at each British embassy situated in each other EU country in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Expenditure on official entertainment in 1993 at British embassies in European Union countries was £1,595,717. It is our practice not to publish how this is divided between posts.

Switzerland

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column *178*, if he will propose that regulations with Switzerland on bilateral agreements include extradition for tax evasion.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Foreign Affairs Council agreed in November 1993 that the priority areas for negotiations with Switzerland were road transport, aviation, research, free movement of people, trade in agricultural goods, public procurement and technical barriers to trade. Extradition is not a matter of Community competence. The United Kingdom has reciprocal extradition arrangements with Switzerland through the Council of Europe convention on extradition, but tax offences are not covered since, unlike the United Kingdom, Switzerland is not party to the relevant section of the second protocol to the convention.

Turkish Cypriots

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the movement of Turkish Cypriots into the United Kingdom from Cyprus.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A person who is neither a British citizen nor a Commonwealth citizen with right of abode nor an EEA national would need to fulfil the requirements of the immigration rules in order to be admitted to the United Kingdom.

ENVIRONMENT

Sewerage Pipe

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *393*, what are the statutory obligations relating to pollution that concern the standards of equipment used to transport sewage.

Mr. Atkins: There are none applying to equipment and sewers. It is up to the water companies how they comply with the conditions attached to discharge consents issued by the National Rivers Authority and more generally how they avoid infringing other requirements relating to pollution.

Minis Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish his departmental Minis report 15.

Mr. Gummer: I expect to publish Minis 15 during July.

Drinking Water

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *344*, how many times the drinking water inspectorate has been informed by water companies of incidents which affected, or threatened to affect, drinking water quality *(a)* for each year since 2 January 1990 and *(b)* by each company.

Mr. Atkins: The numbers of incidents reported to the drinking water inspectorate during the years 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993 were 79, 59, 56 and 52 respectively. Additionally, for those years there were 24 informal notifications where, although the water companies had been concerned about a threat to drinking water quality, it did not materialise; these are classified as non-incidents. For 1994, up to 8 June, 25 notifications have been received. The total number of notifications for the period 2 January 1990 to 8 June 1994 was 295.

Most of the incidents were minor happenings. A typical reported incident is one where some failure in the system resulted in a company advising consumers to boil their water as a precautionary measure while the microbiological quality of the water was carefully investigated.

Data on individual companies, showing the number of incidents reported each year, is as tabulated.

Incidents by company for years 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993 and to 24 June 1994

Company	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994[1]	Total
Bournemouth	—	1	—	—	—	1
Bristol	2	—	2	—	1	5
Cambridge	—	—	1	—	—	1
Chester	1	—	—	—	1	2
Cholderton	—	—	—	—	—	0
East Surrey	—	—	—	—	—	0
Shields	—	—	—	—	—	0
East Worcester	—	—	—	1	—	1
Essex	2	—	2	1	—	5
Folkestone	—	2	—	—	—	2
Hartlepools	1	—	1	—	—	2
Mid Kent	—	—	—	—	1	1
Mid Southern	2	—	—	—	—	2
North East[2]	1	—	—	5	1	7
North Surrey	3	—	1	—	1	5
Portsmouth	—	1	2	2	—	5
South East[3]	2	3	1	—	1	7
South Staffordshire	1	1	—	—	—	2
Suffolk	4	1	—	2	—	7
Sutton	—	—	—	—	—	0
Tendring Hundred	—	—	—	—	—	0
Three Valleys[4]	3	4	2	1	2	12
West Hampshire	1	—	—	—	—	1
Wrexham	—	2	1	—	—	3
York	—	1	—	—	—	1
Anglian	1	1	—	—	—	2
Northumbrian	1	3	1	6	1	12
North West	11	7	5	7	3	33
Severn Trent	—	3	14	7	1	25
Southern	2	1	4	—	2	9
South West	9	5	2	3	1	20
Thames	8	3	3	1	—	15
Welsh	20	13	8	2	2	45
Wessex	1	4	2	3	2	12
Yorkshire	3	3	4	11	5	26
Non-incidents	9	2	10	3	—	24
TOTAL	79	59	56	52	25	295

[1] To 24 June 1994.
[2] North East Water includes the original companies of Newcastle and Gateshead and Sunderland and South.
[3] South East includes original companies of Eastbourne, Mid-Sussex and West Kent.
[4] Three Valleys includes the original companies of Colne Valley, Lee Valley and Rickmansworth.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tests in each year since 1990 by water companies of compliance with the standards for drinking water did not demonstrate compliance with the relevant water quality standards *(a)* by year and *(b)* by water company.

Mr. Atkins: Each year, the companies collectively carry out a total of around 3·75 million tests on drinking water. These data are audited by the drinking water inspectorate. In 1992, 98·7 per cent. of these tests demonstrated compliance with the standards. Of the 1·3 per cent. which demonstrated non-compliance with standards, there is no evidence that any of these contraventions was of such a magnitude or duration as to endanger the health of consumers.

The breakdown of the results by company are given in the table for the years 1990, 1991 and 1992. Data for 1993 are being processed and will be published in the drinking water inspectorate's next annual report.

Drinking Water Quality—Compliance Results
Number of Tests

Company	1990		1991		1992	
	Total	Non Compliance	Total	Non Compliance	Total	Non Compliance
Anglian	329,789	6,506	353,673	5,181	311,531	3,697
Bournemouth[1]	6,506	9	8,529	61	8,106	34
Bristol	25,464	737	28,647	727	35,058	491
Cambridge	7,952	26	8,814	20	9,626	29

Company	1990		1991		1992	
	Total	Non Compliance	Total	Non Compliance	Total	Non Compliance
Chester	3,027	3	3,996	3	4,302	1
Cholderton and District	104	0	310	3	298	0
Colne Valley[2]	19,997	980	18,807	759	22,451	550
Dw'r Cymru	107,066	730	123,692	1,154	111,493	764
East Surrey	20,130	242	13,092	176	16,899	238
East Worcester[3]	8,229	37	12,546	18	12,028	49
Eastbourne[4]	5,389	38	12,375	54	13,935	180
Essex	30,451	1,486	114,077	3,672	152,603	5,316
Folkestone and Dover	13,000	40	5,429	29	4,669	52
Hartlepools	1,333	11	1,190	2	1,156	6
Lee Valley[2]	22,561	327	27,416	287	42,937	310
Mid Kent	12,719	133	18,904	144	17,859	251
Mid Southern	28,491	326	28,341	203	26,965	135
Mid Sussex[4]	23,239	254	31,892	379	24,548	726
North East[5]	48,146	476	60,503	221	51,141	187
North Surrey	11,965	174	17,472	529	21,570	462
North West	455,023	3,258	303,015	2,132	294,380	1,774
Northumbrian	64,069	281	65,093	436	62,112	212
Portsmouth	15,391	52	17,755	41	16,540	36
Rickmansworth[2]	16,434	81	18,676	67	23,328	45
Severn Trent	583,433	2,512	451,245	2,271	402,934	1,381
South Staffordshire	23,450	268	29,128	193	23,232	144
South West	50,980	457	66,257	273	73,819	238
Southern	61,563	487	74,311	474	78,187	453
Suffolk	12,259	105	11,744	38	12,161	36
Sutton District	7,359	40	8,335	65	9,978	59
Tendring Hundred	2,751	29	3,074	15	3,347	9
Thames Water	130,624	5,959	346,957	19,690	492,311	27,532
Wessex	54,248	204	76,500	270	74,087	235
West Hampshire[1]	5,644	14	6,628	23	6,820	33
West Kent[4]	7,528	49	10,388	23	6,185	12
Wrexham and East Denbighshire	5,932	11	5,564	19	4,896	13
York Waterworks	5,882	22	7,259	27	6,481	12
Yorkshire	136,072	1,459	233,133	2,046	295,614	1,937

[1]Bournemouth and West Hampshire are now one company.
[2]Colne Valley, Lee Valley and Rickmansworth together are now Three Valleys Water Co.
[3]East Worcester is now part of Severn Trent.
[4]Eastbourne, Mid-Sussex and West Kent together are now South East Water.
[5]North East was previously Newcastle and Gateshead and Sunderland and South Shield Water Companies.

Foleshill Gas Works

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current position concerning negotiations with British Gas on the redevelopment of the Foleshill gas works site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for English Partnerships and British Gas. However, I understand that negotiations are continuing on the basis of English Partnerships's earlier proposal of grant and a possible joint venture to cover the two parts of the site.

Sea Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the outcome of the Paris Commission meeting on sea pollution held in Karlskrona, Sweden, indicating the decisions taken and the United Kingdom position in each instance.

Mr. Atkins: The annual joint meeting of the commissions established by the 1972 Oslo convention for the prevention of marine pollution by dumping from ships and aircraft and the 1974 Paris convention for the prevention of marine pollution from land-based sources took place in Karlskrona from 13 to 17 June. The commissions consist of representatives of the contracting parties, which are the littoral states of the north-east Atlantic and the European Community.

The commissions reviewed progress in implementing the conventions and in bringing into force the 1992 convention on the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic, and took a number of decisions about their future internal organisations. They adopted the following decisions and recommendations under the conventions—decisions bind those contracting parties that accept them; recommendations have no binding force. They are:

a. PARCOM Recommendation 94/1 on best available techniques for new aluminium electrolysis plants: adopted by a three-quarters majority with reservations by Germany and the UK; the UK reservation was entered because the recommendation selected only certain features from the agreed description of best available techniques and therefore risked distorting the effects of the description, because the emission limit values were only specified in relation to production volumes and not to total emissions, and because no target date was set for bringing emissions from existing plants within the emission limit values for new plants, which could distort competition;

b. PARCOM Recommendation 94/2 on best available techniques and best environmental practice for the integrated and non-integrated sulphite paper pulp industry: adopted by a three-quarters majority with reservations by France, by Portugal and by the UK (for the same reasons, in part, as with Recommendation 94/1);

c. PARCOM Recommendation 94/3 on best available techniques and best environmental practice for the integrated and non-integrated kraft pulp industry: adopted by a three quarters majority with reservations by France and by the UK (for the same reasons, in part, as with Recommendation 94/1);

d. PARCOM Recommendation 94/4 on best available techniques for the organic chemical industry: adopted by a

three-quarters majority with reservations by the UK and Portugal; the UK reservation was entered because the four-page recommendation was too superficial for such a complex subject;

e. PARCOM Recommendation 94/5 concerning best available techniques and best environmental practice for wet processes in the textile processing industry: adopted by a three-quarters majority with reservations by Portugal and by the UK (for the same reasons, in part, as with Recommendation 94/1).

f. PARCOM Decision 94/1 on substances/preparations used and discharged offshore: adopted by a three-quarters majority with reservations by France, by the European Community, by Spain and by the UK; the UK reservation was entered because the decision gave no basis for the selection of the substances named in it and thus cut across the collective work already successfully being undertaken to develop a harmonised control system;

g. PARCOM Recommendation 94/6 on best environmental practice for the reduction of inputs of potentially toxic chemicals from aquaculture use: adopted by a three-quarters majority with reservations by Belgium, by Spain and by the UK; the UK reservation was entered because the Recommendation does not adequately describe best environmental practice;

h. PARCOM Recommendation 94/7 on the elaboration of national action plans and best environmental practice for the reduction of inputs to the environment of pesticides from agricultural use: adopted unanimously; this Recommendation amended last year's Recommendation on the same subject;

i. PARCOM Recommendation 94/8 concerning environmental impact resulting from discharges of radioactive substances: adopted unanimously; this Recommendation commits the Commissions to further review of the environmental impacts of radioactive discharges, past and present;

j. PARCOM Recommendation 94/9 concerning the management of spent nuclear fuel: adopted unanimously; this Recommendation commits the Commissions to requesting the Nuclear Energy Agency of the OECD to carry out a review of the management of spent nuclear fuel.

The Commissions also discussed a number of other draft recommendations and decisions which failed to achieve a three-quarters majority. These are to be studied further. The Commissions also agreed that the difficulties seen by the United Kingdom in a number of the recommendations and decisions were of importance for establishing future recommendations and decisions, and should be looked into during the forthcoming year.

North Sea Pollution

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures have been taken to control the discharge of industrial effluent into the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Under the Water Resources Act 1991, discharges of effluent to rivers and coastal waters require the consent of the relevant regulatory authority—the National Rivers Authority for England and Wales. Consents are designed to ensure that the receiving waters meet environmental quality standards. In addition, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 introduced a system of integrated pollution control for industrial processes with the most potential for polluting releases. Tight control of discharges has led to a progressive reduction in United Kingdom inputs of the most hazardous substances to the North sea, in line with international commitments made at North sea conferences.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to monitor chemical pollution of the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The marine pollution monitoring management group, consisting of scientists from the relevant Government Departments and regulatory authorities, has prepared a national monitoring plan, which is implemented by the agencies with statutory monitoring responsibilities. This is based on a network of inshore, estuarine and offshore monitoring sites. This provides comprehensive information on the seas around the United Kingdom and formed the basis of the United Kingdom input to the monitoring master plan of the North sea task force, which was established by the North sea states, *inter alia*, to prepare the North sea quality status report, which was published in March this year.

Cleveland

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the Prime Minister's oral answer to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) of 16 June, *Official Report*, column 754, regarding consultation on local government reorganisation in Rutland and Huntingdon, if he will make it his policy to ensure that every household in Cleveland is also consulted on the future of local government in its area.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend's decisions on the future local government of Cleveland, which were announced on 18 January, took into account the extensive local consultation undertaken by the Local Government Commission, as well as the representations we received on the Commission's final recommendations for the area.

Council Tax Appeals

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against council tax banding have been received to date; how many have already been decided; and how many are expected to have been decided by *(a)* 31 December 1994 and *(b)* 31 March 1995.

Mr. Curry: The Valuation Office Agency received 909,365 banding appeals in respect of dwellings in England by the end of May, of which 363,542 had already been settled. Around 690,000 appeals are expected to be settled before 31 December 1994 and around 793,000 before 31 March 1995.

Hazardous Wastes

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which developing country parties to the Basel convention have replied to the European Commission indicating *(a)* they do not want to receive exports of green list wastes as classified by the OECD and *(b)* they would like the red and amber list procedures applied to green list wastes; and what measures he intends to take to respect their wishes.

Mr. Atkins: We understand from the European Commission that the following non-OECD parties to the Basel convention have said that they do not wish to receive shipments of any "green list" waste from the European Community:

Chile
Indonesia
Maldives
Saudi Arabia
Senegal

Seychelles
St. Lucia
Tanzania

Brazil and the Republic of Korea have said that they would allow imports of some green list wastes. The following non-OECD parties to the Basel convention have said that they wish amber or red list procedures to apply to shipments of green list waste from the European Community:

Argentina
Czech Republic
Estonia
India
Malaysia
Mexico
Poland
Trinidad and Tobago

Discussions are taking place within the European Community on appropriate action.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment with which parties and non-parties to the Basel convention the United Kingdom has established bilateral agreements for the import or export of hazardous waste; and what steps he has taken to prohibit imports of hazardous waste from *(a)* the United States and *(b)* other non-parties under article 4.5 of the Basel convention.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom has concluded no bilateral agreements under article 11 of the Basel convention. Imports of hazardous waste into the United Kingdom from non-parties to the convention, other than imports of waste destined for recovery from OECD countries, are prohibited by Council regulation (EEC) No. 259/93. It is for competent authorities to ensure compliance with the provisions of the regulation.

Colchester (Officials' Visits)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons the EC paid for the mayor of Colchester, the town clerk and the community services director of Colchester borough council to visit Argos in Greece; under what programme this expenditure was made; who authorised it; how much is to be spent on such trips in the current year; which EC official is responsible; and to which director general in the Commission he is answerable.

Mr. Curry: I understand that the visit was made under the EC's exchange of experience programme, which is run by DG XVI of the Commission. In the United Kingdom, the programme is managed by the Local Government International Bureau, which is sponsored by the local authority associations. Participation in the programme is a matter for individual authorities.

British Waterways Board

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the British Waterways Board has responded to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the service provided by the BWB; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have today placed in the Library of the House the British Waterways Board's initial response to the report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which was published in January 1994.

I am grateful to the commission for the extensive review of the British Waterways Board which it has undertaken. I am happy to report that, in addition to meeting its statutory duties, the MMC found an organisation which has been transformed by devolving responsibility from the centre to individual waterways, the overall performance of which has been improved, and which is developing a strong commercial outlook. The enthusiasm and dedication of staff and their substantial achievements since the MMC's last report in 1987 have been commended. The commission concluded that the BWB must aim to strike the right balance between sustaining the considerable progress already made in developing its commercial ethos and discharging its wider responsibilities, especially for conservation. It made 48 recommendations aimed at securing further improvements in the BWB's performance, in particular in expanding its share of the leisure market. I welcome and endorse the commission's recognition of the BWB's achievements and its constructive recommendations for the future.

I also welcome the BWB's positive response to the MMC's report, which demonstrates a firm commitment to improving the efficiency of the business. Most of the commission's recommendations have been accepted in whole or in part and many have already been implemented. Where appropriate, the board has embarked upon further work as recommended by the MMC. I am satisfied that the BWB has addressed fully those recommendations which have not been accepted. I support the board's programme of seeking increased private sector involvement in the business through market testing and contracting out and I am pleased that the BWB has taken steps to explore potential in the leisure market and to improve relations with its customers.

A number of recommendations would require action either by the Government or jointly by the Government and the BWB. We are keen that the BWB should develop its commercial approach and, with the new chairman, Mr. Bernard Henderson, will be reviewing the board's strategy during 1994-95, in particular the prospects for increasing private sector—including voluntary sector—participation in the BWB's business. This will include consideration of the criteria against which strategic options for the future should be assessed and corporate planning and targets. In the light of the MMC's recommendations we shall also look at appointments to the board and the time that the chairman needs to spend on board matters. We have already confirmed arrangements with the BWB over the treatment of proceeds from property disposals. We are taking into account, as the opportunity arises, the MMC's recommendations on radio communications, development of the BWB's property, development control, dredging tips, wayleaves and inland waterway commercial transport.

I shall continue to monitor the BWB's progress in implementing the MMC's recommendations and will report to the House in due course.

Warrington Borough Council

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has decided to take against Warrington borough council following the notice served on the authority on 17 February, under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988, in respect of street cleaning work.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the response which Warrington borough council has made to the notice served earlier this year and

has today given a direction under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988. The effect of the direction is to require the authority to seek the Secretary of State's consent if it wishes to award street cleaning work to their Direct Service Organisation again when the current arrangements expire in 1997.

Local Government Earnings

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each local authority area and for England as a whole, for the latest available date, the average earnings of local government employees.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 29 June 1994]:* Information on the earnings of employees in local government is available from the "New Earnings Survey". The table gives the average weekly earnings of all employees in the local government sector for each county area for London boroughs and for England as a whole. The figures include employees of both district and county councils. Information on individual county and district councils is not held centrally.

Average gross weekly earnings of full time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence: April 1993

Local government sector	£
England	340·8
South East Region	
Greater London	389·0
City of London	'
Barking	369·3
Barnet	406·3
Bexley	'
Brent	354·7
Bromley	366·0
Camden	415·9
Croydon	350·5
Ealing	389·0
Enfield	'
Greenwich	362·0
Hackney	387·8
Hammersmith	383·2
Haringey	354·2
Harrow	377·0
Havering	'
Hillingdon	346·9
Hounslow	339·5
Islington	381·1
Kensington and Chelsea	'
Kingston-upon-Thames	407·3
Lambeth	'
Lewisham	362·9
Merton	'
Newham	349·6
Redbridge	396·5
Richmond-upon-Thames	'
Southwark	413·8
Sutton	'
Tower Hamlets	420·6
Waltham Forest	'
Wandsworth	'
City of Westminster	451·9
Remainder of South East Region	
Bedfordshire	334·0
Berkshire	368·0
Buckinghamshire	343·0
East Sussex	331·8
Essex	338·9
Hampshire	355·0
Hertfordshire	353·2
Isle of Wight	'
Kent	341·6
Oxfordshire	344·9
Surrey	356·1
West Sussex	326·8
East Anglia Region	
Cambridgeshire	323·4
Norfolk	345·5
Suffolk	349·0
South West Region	
Avon	333·3
Cornwall	319·4
Devon	345·8
Dorset	319·3
Gloucestershire	326·7
Somerset	323·7
Wiltshire	362·1
West Midlands Region	
West Midlands MC	328·9
Hereford and Worcester	332·1
Shropshire	310·9
Staffordshire	304·2
Warwickshire	339·5
East Midlands Region	
Derbyshire	311·9
Leicestershire	324·8
Lincolnshire	346·9
Northamptonshire	334·0
Nottinghamshire	302·7
Yorkshire and Humberside Region	
South Yorkshire MC	320·7
West Yorkshire MC	326·9
Humberside	305·8
North Yorkshire	328·6
North West Region	
Greater Manchester MC	321·1
Merseyside MC	326·6
Cheshire	360·8
Lancashire	329·1
North Region	
Tyne and Wear MC	306·4
Cleveland	257·5
Cumbria	352·9
Durham	313·5
Northumberland	335·7

Source: "New Earnings Survey".
' Denotes sample too small and/or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are *(a)* the names of all members of the Northern Ireland tourist board, *(b)* the organisation each member represents, *(c)* the perceived religious affiliation of each member, *(d)* the date of appointment and the period of such appointment, *(e)* the political party affiliation of each member and *(f)* the council area of Northern Ireland in which each member resides.

Mr. Tim Smith: Members do not represent an organisation, but are appointed on merit. Personal information on religious and political affiliation cannot be disclosed. The other information requested is as follows.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Name	*Date of Appointment*	*Period of Appointment*	*Northern Ireland Council Area in which Member Resides*
Hon. Hugh O'Neill *(Chairman)*	1 July 1994	2 Years	Ballymena Borough Council
Mr. Brian Adgey	1 April 1993	3 Years	Ards Borough Council
Mr. Roy Bailie	1 July 1994	3 Years	Antrim Borough Council
Mr. Gerry Burns, MBE	1 July 1994	3 Years	Fermanagh District Council
Mrs. Annie Courtney	1 July 1994	3 Years	Derry City Council
Mr. Tony Hopkins	1 April 1992	3 Years	North Down Borough Council
Mr. Alan Lambert	1 April 1994	3 Years	Great Britain Resident
Mr. William McGinnis	1 July 1994	3 Years	Magherafelt District Council
Dr. Mary Peters, CBE	1 April 1993	3 Years	Lisburn Borough Council

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria he applies when selecting persons for appointment to the Northern Ireland tourist board.

Mr. Tim Smith: Appointments are made on the basis of an individual's experience and expertise and potential to contribute to the functions of the tourist board.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the current members of the Northern Ireland tourist board have a career background in *(a)* the hotel, *(b)* the catering and *(c)* the tourist sectors.

Mr. Tim Smith: The NITB chairman, the hon. Hugh O'Neill, and Mr. Brian Adgey have a career background in these fields. Other members bring further experience in financial and business matters, local/regional issues and PR/events management.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what were the conclusions of the Fair Employment Commission on the areas from which the work force of Howden Sirocco is drawn; which of those areas were omitted from the catchment area on which the quotas were set for applications and appointees; and what was the reason for the omission of each of those areas;

(2) how many of the employees of the Sunblest bakery at Orby Link, Castlereagh, were found by the Fair Employment Commission to be drawn from the district council areas of North Down and Ards;

(3) in how many of the cases setting the quotas for applicants and appointees specified in the affirmative action programmes published by the Fair Employment Commission in June, the commission omitted the requirement that all appointments will be made on the basis of merit; and for what reasons in each case;

(4) which district council areas were omitted in the affirmative action programme published by the Fair Employment Commission in June for the Sunblest bakery at Orby Link, Castlereagh from the catchment area on which the quotas set for applications and appointees are based; and for what reason in each case.

Mr. Tim Smith: This is primarily a matter for the Fair Employment Commission. I am satisfied that in agreeing affirmative action programmes with firms, the Fair Employment Commissioin acts with due regard to all the circumstances of each particular case. The content of those agreements and the data upon which they are based are a matter for the Commission and the firms concerned. Under fair employment legislation, quotas are unlawful but there is provision for setting goals and timetables—that is, targets that firms would expect and should make good faith efforts, to reach within a certain time scale.

Neil Latimer

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress there has been in the review of the conviction of Neil Latimer; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In my reply of 22 April, *Official Report*, columns *721-22*, I explained the criterion for the exercise of my statutory power to refer a case to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland. I pointed out that so far none of the representations received had fulfilled that criterion.

Since then, I have given consideration to the points raised about Mr. Latimer's conviction during an Adjournment debate on 23 February and have requested further material. When I have received and considered it I shall write to all those hon. Members who have made representations to me in recent months about this case.

Lisnevin Training School

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of children who are currently being held in Lisnevin training school, by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex, *(c)* ethnic origin and *(d)* legislation under which they are being held; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: The number of children detained in Lisnevin training school on Friday 24 June 1994 is as follows:

Age	*Special unit*	*Remand unit*	*PACE orders*	*Total*
13	1	nil	nil	1
14	nil	3	nil	3
15	3	11	nil	14
16	4	7	nil	11
17	1	2	nil	3
18	nil	nil	nil	nil
Total	9	23	nil	32

Note:
All children detained in the School on 24 June 1994 are (a) male; (b) white; and (c) detained under the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of children who were received into Lisnevin training school, by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex, *(c)* ethnic origin and *(d)* legislation under which they were held, for each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: The number of children received into Lisnevin training school in the *(a)* special unit; *(b)* remand unit; and *(c)* PACE remand categories are given in the tables.

Special Unit

Year	Age								Total
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1985	—	—	1	2	8	5	2	—	18
1986	—	—	1	2	4	2	—	1	10
1987	—	—	1	1	4	2	1	—	9
1988	—	—	2	4	3	2	—	—	11
1989	—	—	1	2	7	1	2	—	13
1990	—	—	—	3	6	—	—	—	9
1991	—	—	2	4	5	1	—	—	12
1992	—	—	—	4	3	3	—	—	10
1993	—	—	2	1	3	1	—	—	7
Total	—	—	10	23	43	17	5	99	
Grand Total									99

Note: All children included in this table are *(a)* male, *(b)* white and *(c)* detained under the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968.

Remand Unit

Year	Age								Total
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1985	—	—	1	21	38	48	16	—	124
1986	—	—	10	30	60	62	5	—	167
1987	—	5	12	29	50	67	7	—	170
1988	—	2	10	22	34	62	—	—	130
1989	—	2	5	21	42	88	4	—	162
1990	—	—	4	19	40	66	4	—	133
1991	—	—	7	21	47	75	14	—	164
1992	—	4	12	27	35	82	14	—	174
1993	1	5	8	35	62	92	4	1	208
Total	1	18	69	225	408	642	68	1	1,432
Grand Total									1,432

Note: All children included in this table are *(a)* male, *(b)* white and *(c)* detained under the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968.

PACE Remands

Year	Total
1990	69
1991	31
1992	61
1993	96
Total	257

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the occupancy rate of Lisnevin training school *(a)* as a total and *(b)* broken down by age for each month since January 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: Lisnevin training school is registered to accommodate up to 40 children—15 special unit places and 25 remand unit places.

The average occupancy figure for each month since January 1990 is shown in the table.

	1990	1991	1992	1993
January	28	20	21	22
February	30	25	25	31
March	30	26	28	34
April	28	29	34	37
May	28	26	38	36
June	27	25	40	31
July	20	24	37	25
August	17	25	28	21
September	20	28	28	25
October	24	26	32	23
November	18	28	28	19
December	15	23	23	25

Note: Breakdown by age could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current re-offending rate for children leaving Lisnevin training school; if he will place a copy of research into this matter in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: Research into reconviction rates for those young persons who had been at Lisnevin was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office in 1990. The draft report was submitted in October 1993. It contains information which would suggest that the average reconviction rates for those leaving the special unit at Lisnevin after one year is 37 per cent. which rises to 85 per cent. after three years. The latter figure should not be attributed to the effects of the secure environment because the young person has long since returned to the crimogenic environment from whence he originally came. The

researcher is presently working on a final version of the report, a copy of which, when it is published, will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the riot which occurred in Lisnevin training school over Easter 1994, with particular reference to *(a)* how the incident started, *(b)* how long it lasted, *(c)* how many children were involved, *(d)* how many children were hurt in the riot and *(e)* how much damage was caused by the riot.

Sir John Wheeler: There was no riot, but an incident did occur at 7.30 pm on 5 April when young men, evacuated to the dining room following the activation of the fire alarm, took advantage of the situation and caused damage estimated at £29,000 to that area. There were 32 young men in the establishment at that time. Control was restored at approx 10.15 pm. Two young men received hospital treatment as a result of injuries received during the disturbance.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding the current inquiry into the riot at Lisnevin training school, the inquiry's terms of reference, the inquiry team's members, the progress of the report to date and the expected completion and publication dates for the inquiry report; and if he will place a copy of the inquiry report in the Library when it is available.

Sir John Wheeler: I requested an investigation into the unrest at Lisnevin on 5 April 1994. Its terms of reference were

"To examine the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the unrest at Lisnevin over the Easter period in April 1994 and report to the Minister lessons to be learnt".

Membership was drawn from the criminal justice services division of the Northern Ireland Office, the social services inspectorate of the Department of Health and Social Services and the Lisnevin management board.

The report of the investigation, which is now complete, will be with me on 1 July 1994. The investigation, as is normal in such circumstances, is internal. A report therefore will not be placed in the Library.

Compensation Agency

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the business plan for 1994-95 for the Compensation Agency will be published.

Sir John Wheeler: The Compensation Agency's business plan will be published today. The plan explains the agency's business and organisation and sets out assumptions about work loads and resources which underpin the plans and targets identified for this year. I have made arrangements for copies to be placed in the Library.

Human Rights

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has received the nineteenth report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The report for the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994 has been published today, and copies have been laid before Parliament.

The Commission has considered a wide and varied range of matters during the period under review. They include important questions relating to the findings of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice and how they could be applied to Northern Ireland and a conclusion to the Commission's examination of the problems of under-achievement in schools. I welcome also its careful and considered views on security-related issues. They raise a number of issues which I shall keep under review.

I very much value the advice and insight which the Commission gives me on a wide range of human rights issues. The Commission's recommendations have influenced the evolution of a number of important policy proposals affecting the rights of children. I look forward to the outcome of its work on disability, and to the important contribution that it will make to the employment equality review.

Copies of my response to the Commission's 19th report and the report itself have been placed in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Driving Test Centres

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report,* column *333,* if he will list how each driving test centre in the United Kingdom scored on the criteria listed as marked A to D in the chief executive's reply;

(2) if he will list by driving test centre the number of driving tests conducted during 1993;

(3) if he will list the driving test centres that are being considered for closure by the Driving Standards Agency.

Mr. Key: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Driving Standards Agency under its chief executive, Dr. S. J. Ford. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given. An annex of figures on total tests conducted by region will be placed in the Library.

Letter from John Ford to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 20 June 1994:

Driving Standards Agency

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to the questions you raised about certain of DSA's operations.

PQ 2552/93/94

You asked about the driving test centres currently being considered for closure.

Although the Agency will continue to keep its estate under review, there are no driving test centres, in addition to the 22 announced recently, that are currently being considered for closure.

PQ 2596/93/94

You also asked by driving test centre for the number of tests conducted during 1993.

The figures are in the attached annex for the second half of the year, the first being for car tests and the second for LGV/PCV. Because of changes in the way statistics were compiled, the information for the last six months of 1993 is more readily available. Those tests conducted at occasional centres are included in the those for the main centre. I hope this will be satisfactory.

PQ 2560/93/94

Finally, you asked, pursuant to Mr. Key's reply of 24 February to Mr. Brian Donohoe, Official Report, column 333, about how each driving test centre in the United Kingdom scored on the criterion I listed as marked A to D in my reply.

In reviewing its test centre estate, the Agency did not score each and every test centre individually against the criteria quoted in my reply of 24 February. Centres were identified for consideration against the criteria based upon the experience of our Regional staff.

Road Schemes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements have been made by his Department for private investigators to gather data on protesters against road schemes, other than the contract awarded to Bray's detective agency regarding Twyford down.

Mr. Key: As the information requested relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency, I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 28 June 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about whether any arrangements have been made for the use of private investigators, other than at Twyford Down, to gather data on protestors against road schemes.

In addition to the contract awarded to Brays Detective Agency for the M3 extension at Twyford Down, the Highways Agency have made arrangements for the gathering of information about protestors against road schemes at three other locations.

The Agency will be using the information gathered to ensure that the progress of these particular schemes, which have all successfully completed the statutory procedures, is not unduly disrupted and that they can be completed as quickly as possible.

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the Salisbury bypass; and what are *(a)* the current estimated costs, *(b)* the planned commencement date and *(c)* expected completion date of the project.

Mr. Steven Norris: The question is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. The chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 29 June 1994:

A36 Salisbury Bypass

I am writing in response to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Transport about the A36 Salisbury Bypass. This is a matter for which the Highways Agency is responsible.

In response to the published proposals, the Highways Agency received 296 objections, 39 letters of support and 26 other representations. At the public inquiry, which ran from April 1993 to April 1994, there were 87 personal appearances. The need for the bypass and the published route is supported by Wiltshire County Council, Salisbury District Council and Salisbury's Civic Society and Chamber of Commerce. There were no objections from the statutory environmental bodies, ie the Countryside Commission, English Nature, the National Rivers Authority and English Heritage.

The estimated cost of the scheme is approximately £65M for works excluding VAT, and land. The start of construction depends upon the outcome of the recent public inquiry, the subsequent decision of the Secretaries of State for Environment and Transport and the continuing availability of funds.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decisions his Department has taken in respect of TECs over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement with TECs over the same period.

Mr. Norris: My Department has no responsibilities for the funding and sponsorship of TECs. The Department and its agencies have dealt with local TECs in connection with work to meet the investors in people standard in respect of the Department's own staff. The Department has also worked with appropriate TECs in their role in the regeneration of local economies. TEC resource centres have been used to preview training material and staff have occasionally attended events sponsored by TECs.

Passenger Rail Franchises

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the Franchising Director to publish the minimum specification requirements for proposed passenger train franchises.

Mr. Freeman: The Franchising Director will be formally consulting local authorities and rail users consultative committees on the proposed specifications for franchises before inviting tenders. I expect the first of those consultations to take place early next year.

I understand that the Franchising Director is also intending to submit for comment his overall approach to setting such specifications, as the policy on this is further developed.

Railtrack

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the Railtrack board since 1 April.

Mr. Freeman: Railtrack began operations as planned on 1 April as a separate Government-owned company following many months of work to put the necessary organisation and contracts in place. Railtrack has successfully established itself as the owner and operator of the national railway infrastructure.

Rail Consultants

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much Shandwick Consultants is being paid by *(a)* the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and *(b)* by his Department; and what is its remit.

Mr. Freeman: Payment to Shandwick Consultants by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Department of Transport will be by reference to hourly rates for work done. For commercial reasons, it is not the practice to disclose these rates. Shandwick Consultants's remit is to provide advice to Opraf on the marketing of franchises, and to the Department on overarching privatisation marketing issues.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the introduction of a remote sensing system to measure vehicle emissions.

Mr. Key: The Department of Transport has been undertaking research on a remote sensing emissions analyser developed with the aim of detecting "gross polluters" as they pass through a beam crossing the carriageway. Results so far are, however, disappointing and we see no immediate prospects of using such a device as means of assessing vehicle emissions.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve and encourage proper levels of vehicle maintenance to reduce emissions.

Mr. Key: The Government have already adopted a number of measures. Since September 1992, heavy diesel-powered vehicles have been required to meet specified smoke limits based on an instrumented test carried out at the annual inspection. The test was extended to diesel cars and other light vehicles from February this year as a requirement of the MOT test. For petrol vehicles, the MOT test has included checks on CO and hydrocarbons since November 1991. I shall be consulting shortly on new regulations that will tighten the limits for all vehicles in line with the EC roadworthiness directive 92/55/EEC.

The Department regularly issues publications advising motorists and vehicle operators on the need for good maintenance and other measures that will reduce emissions.

In the longer term, the Department is pressing the European Commission to introduce a requirement for "on-board" diagnostic systems for post-2000 vehicles that will warn the driver in the event of a malfunction of the emissions control system and prompt him to seek immediate repairs. Such a system could be highly effective not only in promoting rapid repairs but in permitting more effective roadside and annual enforcement of emissions standards.

Traffic Area Officers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date traffic area co-ordinating division reached the decision that traffic area officers would withdraw from Driving Standards Agency work; when the Driving Standards Agency was notified; and when the unions were informed.

Mr. Key: The possible withdrawal of the traffic area offices from Driving Standards Agency work has been under consideration for some time, and the Driving Standards Agency was informed of the intention to withdraw on 1 June 1994. No decision has yet been taken on the precise date of withdrawal. This matter is on the agenda for a meeting with the unions on 11 July.

Car Design

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to urge the European Commission to bring forward proposals for *(a)* a side-impact protection directive and *(b)* a new European standard for car design for pedestrian protection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We have already urged the Commission to bring forward early proposals for both of these.

London Underground

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing for each London underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number of fire and smoke incidents and the proportion that were *(a)* category A, *(b)* category B and *(c)* category C.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The figures requested are available up to 28 May. These are shown on a line-by-line basis in the table.

London underground fire and smoke incidents between 1 January 1994 and 28 May 1994

	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994			*Period 12* 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994			*Period 13* 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994			*Period 1* 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994			*Period 2* 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994		
Category	*A*	*B*	*C*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*A*	*B*	*C*
Bakerloo	1	1	19	0	0	17	0	2	19	3	0	14	0	0	9
Central	1	4	14	1	5	22	2	3	21	0	2	15	3	0	9
Circle/H and C	0	0	6	0	0	13	0	0	5	1	0	4	0	1	12
District	1	2	8	0	1	6	0	4	12	1	1	15	1	4	8
Jubilee/ELL	0	1	2	1	2	2	1	0	6	1	0	2	2	4	6
Metropolitan	0	1	8	0	2	15	2	2	14	0	0	14	1	3	7
Northern	0	0	17	3	1	18	3	4	22	2	1	21	1	2	19
Piccadilly	0	0	27	0	1	23	0	0	16	0	1	17	0	0	16
Victoria	0	1	12	0	0	13	0	0	11	0	0	4	0	0	7

Notes:
H and C= Hammersmith and City Line; ELL=East London Line.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 24 June the number of (i) crimes of violence, (ii) robbery and (iii) other offences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Figures are available up to 28 May. These are shown in the table:

London underground: crime figures

Line	Type of crime	Period 11 1 January 1994 to 29 January 1994	Period 12 30 January 1994 to 26 February 1994	Period 13 27 February 1994 to 31 March 1994	Period 1 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1994	Period 2 1 May 1994 to 28 May 1994
Bakerloo	Crimes of violence	4	5	4	0	5
	Robbery	6	3	4	5	4
	Other offences	53	24	44	42	25
Central	Crimes of violence	9	5	12	10	8
	Robbery	14	3	6	7	8
	Other offences	179	189	211	153	143
Circle/H and C	Crimes of violence	0	0	1	1	2
	Robbery	1	1	3	0	0
	Other offences	22	40	48	47	26
District Line	Crimes of violence	14	7	13	10	8
	Robbery	5	4	6	5	3
	Other offences	123	95	153	142	145
Jubilee/ELL	Crimes of violence	7	5	4	3	5
	Robbery	2	3	5	2	3
	Other offences	42	26	40	51	44
Metropolitan	Crimes of violence	4	4	9	6	7
	Robbery	5	8	8	4	5
	Other offences	100	107	109	96	82
Northern	Crimes of violence	8	7	14	14	8
	Robbery	5	11	6	9	10
	Other offences	147	151	178	147	114
Piccadilly	Crimes of violence	12	12	9	7	9
	Robbery	11	5	9	9	6
	Other offences	298	196	206	255	221
Victoria	Crimes of violence	6	1	7	8	2
	Robbery	5	2	4	7	1
	Other offences	88	74	119	94	70

Notes:

1. H and C=Hammersmith and City Line; ELL=East London Line.
2. Crimes of violence include aggravated assaults on staff, BTP officers and passengers.
3. Robbery offences include assaults with intent to rob.
4. All data supplied to LUL by the BTP.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the actual number of new jobs created by the establishment of the Child Support Agency; what was the original estimate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 30 June 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of new jobs created by the Child Support Agency.

The original staffing requirement for the Child Support Agency was estimated at 5,000 made up of 3,000 new posts and approximately 2,000 posts previously allocated to the Benefits Agency.

The Agency has now recruited up to its original requirement and is continuing to recruit to meet identified staffing needs. The number of staff currently in post is 5,268.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how often he meets the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to discuss the operation and policy of the agency; what is his best estimate of how long, on average, he spends at such meetings each month; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State does not have a regular schedule of meetings with the chief executive of the Child Support Agency. Although much of the contact between the chief executive and Ministers is in writing, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I do have frequent meetings with the chief executive to discuss items of particular significance. In addition, as Minister responsible for matters relating to child support, I have monthly meetings with the chief executive to discuss the operation and performance of the agency. Those meetings are usually of two hours duration, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, is kept fully appraised of the issues that arise from them.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the annual reports of the independent living (1993) fund and the independent living (extension) fund to be made available to Parliament.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the director of the funds that the annual reports of both funds will be published during the first week in July. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Benefits (Irish Citizens)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions he has given to his officers at Neath and Port Talbot regarding residence qualifications for new entrants to the area from Ireland and their entitlement to social security payments.

Mr. Burt: None.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of social security payments made to caravan owners and their families coming to the United Kingdom from Ireland.

Mr. Burt: None. Information is not held centrally on the number of people coming to the United Kingdom from Ireland who are in receipt of social security benefits.

Information Technology Services Agency

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the Director of ITSA has been paid a performance-related bonus for the most recent reporting year.

Mr. Hague: The ITSA chief executive's entitlement to a performance-related bonus is largely determined by the achievement of key performance targets for the agency. Details of achievement against these targets will be included in the agency's 1993-94 report and accounts, a copy of which will be placed in the Library before the summer recess.

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the decision to abolish reduced earnings allowance for people claiming industrial injuries benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Reduced earnings allowance for new accidents and diseases was abolished in October 1990 as part of a package of measures designed to focus benefit on those with the most severe disabilities. The REA may still be claimed for accidents occurring before October 1990 or prescribed diseases which were listed before then and where the onset of the disease was earlier.

A defect in the legislation also enables claims to be made in respect of diseases added to the prescribed list since October 1990, although only where the onset was before that date. This was never the policy intention. We shall bring forward an amendment with effect from October 1994 so that the REA will not be payable for any further extension of the prescribed list.

In the meantime, the Benefits Agency will carry out a special exercise to identify people who have been awarded an assessment of at least 1 per cent. for diseases added to the list since October 1990 and where the date of onset was earlier. Those people will be invited to make a claim for REA.

WALES

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many steel manufacturing jobs there were in Wales *(a)* in 1988 and *(b)* in 1993.

Mr. Redwood: A total of 20,207 jobs in 1988 and around 18,000 in 1993. The steel industry has improved its productivity substantially and is an important Welsh success story.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of jobs in manufacturing in Wales *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The number of employees in employment in manufacturing in Wales in June 1979 was 315,000 and in June 1993 was 210,000. This reflects the remarkable growth in productivity in Wales over the period. Output per employee in the production industries in Wales increased by almost 70 per cent. between 1979 and 1993. There was also, over the same period, an increase in employment in service industries of 100,000.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many coal industry jobs there were in Wales *(a)* in 1988 and *(b)* in 1993.

Mr. Redwood: Some 9,200 jobs in 1988 and 3,200 in 1993.

Teachers (Assaults)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of pupils assaulting teachers have been reported in Wales in *(a)* 1973, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is not collected centrally.

Best-kept Village Competition

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to reinstate on a national level the best-kept village competition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This scheme was previously organised by the voluntary sector in Wales, but it has not operated on an all-Wales basis since 1991. I understand the voluntary sector considers that other schemes, such as the Prince of Wales awards and the Shell Better Britain campaign are better able to promote environmental improvements in local communities. I believe that this view has not really been contested to date.

Mussel Purification Centre

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will permit the mussel purification centre in Conwy to remain open until alternative arrangements can be made; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will explain the reasons for the closure of the mussel purification centre at Benarth road, Conwy; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what financial assistance his Department will give to establish modern mussel purification facilities in Conwy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Conwy mussel purification centre was closed at the end of the 1993-94 season because it does not comply with the minimum European Union standards for construction and hygiene set out in the Food Safety (Live Bivalve Mollusc and Other Shellfish) Regulations 1992. For the same reasons, the facilities cannot be temporarily reopened. The Welsh Office has been in contact with representatives of the local shellfish industry to offer advice on the availability of financial assistance from United Kingdom and EC sources for any private sector project to establish a new purification facility.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what restrictions there will be upon employees of the Welsh Joint Education Committee standing for election to the new Welsh unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Office's view is that employees working for the Welsh Joint Education Committee would be disqualified for standing for election to a unitary authority under section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972.

BSE

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of compensation is given to farmers in Wales for each cow slaughtered because of BSE; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Compensation paid to farmers in Wales for an animal compulsorily slaughtered as a BSE suspect is an amount equal to 100 per cent. of either the market value of the animal or the monthly indicative market price—IMP—whichever is the lower figure. Where subsequent laboratory examination does not confirm that the animal was affected by BSE, compensation is an amount equal to 100 per cent. of the market value of the animal or 125 per cent. of the monthly IMP, whichever is the lower figure. The monthly IMP is a weighted average of prices of Friesian and Holstein cows, heifers in milk and in calf, and barren dairy cattle, taking into account the age distribution of cattle slaughtered as BSE suspects in the month. The IMP for July will be £890.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individual payments have been made to farmers in Wales as compensation for the slaughter of cows infected with BSE; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: It is not possible without disproportionate costs to separate the total amount paid out in BSE compensation into individual payments made to farmers. However, the total number of cattle compulsorily slaughtered as BSE suspects since August 1988 and up to 28 June 1994 on which compensation would have automatically been paid in Wales is 13,603. There are also occasions where because compulsory slaughter has not taken place compensation is not automatically paid. In those circumstances, each individual case is assessed on its merits and ex-gratia payments may be awarded.

Brynmawr School

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he received an application from Brynmawr grant-maintained school for extra grant.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have not received an application for extra grant from Brynmawr grant-maintained school.

Welsh Health Common Services Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provisions have been made to advertise for competitive tender the proposed privatisation of the supplies division of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The authority will be preparing specific proposals for market testing.

Repair Grants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to fulfil his departmental commitment to discuss with Church authorities in Wales the need for repair grants arising from damage caused by atmospheric polluters.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[pursuant to his reply, 21 June, c. 156]:* A printing error was made in the final sentence. The figure for repairs to historic religious buildings should have read £577,331 in 1993-94.

DEFENCE

RAF Flying Training

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the practical viability of completing the full advanced flying training requirement at RAF Chivenor;

(2) how much would be saved annually by closing RAF Valley.

Mr. Hanley: My Department's study of the RAF's flying training organisation which I announced on 7 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *177,* considered options for providing RAF flying training in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. The scope for carrying out flying training at RAF Chivenor was considered as part of this study. Chivenor does not, however, have the capacity to undertake all the future advanced flying training—AFT—task and, because it only has a single runway—compared to Valley's three—it would not be suitable for a high volume of concentrated AFT operations.

The study also concluded that, for operational reasons, RAF Valley should not be closed, and figures relating to savings which might result from its closure are not therefore available.

Service Forecasts

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the trend in pilot into productive service forecasts.

Mr. Hanley: There is at present and for the foreseeable future a sufficient number of pilots coming out of training to meet the needs of the Royal Air Force. Since the mid-1980s, the number of pilots entering productive service has progressively reduced because of reductions in the front line caused by "Options for Change" and other adjustments.

RAF St. Athan

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what estimate he has made of the on-going costs of operating the entire weapons range training requirement from RAF St. Athan;

(2) if he will estimate the costs involved in increasing the licensed weapons loading platforms and otherwise preparing the base at RAF St. Athan for the task of supporting weapons range training sorties.

Mr. Hanley: As set out in the consultation document issued on 7 December 1993, the cost of preparing RAF St. Athan for use as a weapons detachment facility is estimated to be around £3,500,000. In addition, the associated annual operating costs are estimated to be £470,000. The savings from closing RAF Chivenor are assessed to be approximately £127 million, at net present values, over 10 years.

Land Mines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many self-destruct mines have been recovered intact in Kuwait; and what are the policy consequences of this.

Mr. Hanley: Figures for the whole of Kuwait are not available. However, I understand that Royal Ordnance plc discovered 146 self-destruct mines in its clearance area, all of which, for safety reasons, it destroyed in situ, without attempting to establish their condition. There are no policy consequences from this.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the manufacture or export by British firms of anti-personnel landmines that are not of a self-destructive or self-neutralising kind.

Mr. Aitken: No such landmines have been manufactured or exported by British industry for over a decade.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's involvement with TECs.

Mr. Hanley: My Department liaises closely with the training and enterprise councils in areas where significant reductions in either service or civilian staff are planned. For civilian staff, all major decisions likely to affect employment are notified separately to the appropriate TECs at the time that they are announced, and the commercial companies providing my Department's outplacement service work with the local TEC to ensure the best direction of effort to help those staff made redundant. Service leavers are more dispersed geographically and obtain TEC services through measures such as the tri-service resettlement organisation's regional resettlement centres.

Royal Naval College

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 12 May, *Official Report*, column *203*, what further consideration has been given to the costs of maintaining the premises currently occupied by the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, if they were no longer used as a staff college, and if no other appropriate use could be found for them;

(2) what consideration he has given to the feasibility of locating all three service staff colleges at Greenwich, if buildings adjacent to the Royal Naval College which are currently vacant, such as the former Dreadnought seaman's hospital, were to be brought into use for this purpose;

(3) further to his answer of 12 May, *Official Report*, column *203*, whether he has yet received recommendations concerning the future location of the three service staff colleges and the future of the Royal Naval College premises at Greenwich;

(4) what consideration has been given by his Department to the use of the premises formerly occupied by the Dreadnought seaman's hospital at Greenwich to enhance the staff college facilities at Greenwich.

Mr. Hanley: The defence costs study into training has examined staff training at all three service staff colleges. The study has completed its work and has made a number of formal recommendations which are now under consideration by Ministers. No decisions have yet been taken. We hope to announce the broad outcome of the defence costs study as a whole before the House rises for the summer recess.

Defence Satellites

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much it cost to send into orbit the two defence satellites recently launched by a French ballistic rocket.

Mr. Aitken: Details of the cost of sending into orbit the two small defence technology research satellites launched by an Ariane 4 commercial launcher on 17 June 1994 are subject to commercial confidentiality.

Russian Nuclear Submarines

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments have been made by the nuclear-powered warships safety committee of the safety record, and conformity with United Kingdom nuclear safety standards, of the Russian Typhoon class submarine.

Mr. Aitken: None.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Russian authorities concerning visits by Russian nuclear-powered submarines to British ports during 1994.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no such discussions.

Clyde Submarine Base

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names, countries of origin and dates of all foreign naval vessel visits to the Clyde submarine base since 1990.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Vessel*	*Nationality*
1990		
16-20 February	HNLMS Isaac Sweers	Netherlands
11-13 March	HNLMS Potvis	Netherlands
22 September	HMCS Ojibwa	Canada
1-5 October	FS Rubis	France
6-12 October	HMCS Ojibwa	Canada
20 October	HNLMS Tijgerhaai	Netherlands
20 October	HNLMS Haarlem	Netherlands
26-29 October	HNLMS Tonjin	Netherlands
3-5 November	HMCS Ojibwa	Canada
8 November	HNLMS Zeeleeuw	Netherlands
21-22 November	BNS Westdiep	Belgium
1991		
8-10 February	HNLMS Potvis	Netherlands
18-21 May	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands

Date	Vessel	Nationality
26 May	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands
7-10 June	HNLMS Zwaardvis	Netherlands
14-18 June	HNLMS Zwaardvis	Netherlands
23-27 September	USS Groton	USA
6-7 October	HNLMS Potvis	Netherlands
8-12 November	FS Beveziers	France
22 November	BNS Wielengen	Belgium
27 November to 1 December	HNLMS Tijgerhaai	Netherlands
1992		
29 February to 3 March	HMCS Ojibwa	Canada
6 March	HMCS Ojibwa	Canada
17-18 April	HNLMS Zeeleeuw	Netherlands
1 May	HNLMS Zeeleeuw	Netherlands
15-18 May	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands
22-27 May	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands
29 May	NHLMS Walrus	Netherlands
13 June	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands
29-31 July	USS Newport News	USA
25-31 August	FS Emeraud	France
31 August to 3 September	USS Albany	USA
14-23 September	USS Sturgeon	USA
16-18 November	USS Finback	USA
1993		
8-9 January	USS Baltimore	USA
19-22 February	HNLMS Zeeleeuw	Netherlands
6-13 April	HNLMS Tijgerhaai	Netherlands
19-20 April	HNLMS Tijgerhaai	Netherlands
21-23 April	HNLMS Tijgerhaai	Netherlands
10-17 May	USS San Juan	USA
21-24 May	HNLMS Zwaardvis	Netherlands
25-28 May	HNLMS Dolfijn	Netherlands
27-29 May	HNLMS Bruinvis	Netherlands
31 May to 1 June	HNLMS Zwaardvis	Netherlands
31 May to 2 June	HNLMS Dolfijn	Netherlands
2-3 June	HNLMS Zwaardvis	Netherlands
3 June	HNLMS Dolfijn	Netherlands
3-7 June	HNLMS Bruinvis	Netherlands
4 June	HNLMS Dolfijn	Netherlands
20-22 August	USS Alexandria	USA
30 August	FS Amethyste	France
13 September to 5 October	FS Agosta	France
14-16 October	USS Dallas	USA
14-18 October	HNLMS Dolfijn	Netherlands
19-22 October	USS Dallas	USA
25-28 October	HNLMS Dolfijn	Netherlands
29 October to 1 November	SNS Andalucia	Spain
31 October to 1 November	USS Dallas	USA
23-30 December	USS Albany	USA
1994		
18-22 February	HNLMS Tijgerhaai	Netherlands
18-22 February	HNLMS Mercuur	Netherlands
24-25 February	HNLMS Mercuur	Netherlands
13-17 March	USS Phoenix	USA
31 March to 1 April	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands
11-12 April	HNLMS Walrus	Netherlands
23-27 May	HNLMS Zeeleeuw	Netherlands
3-6 June	KNM Utsira	Norway
10-13 June	KNM Utsira	Norway
23-25 June	USS Whale	USA

Peace Operations

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much in cash terms and in constant prices the Government spent in 1980, 1990, 1991 and 1992 on peace operations in east and central Europe involving British military personnel.

Mr. Hanley: British military personnel were not involved an any peacekeeping operations in east and west Europe in 1980, 1990 or 1991. During 1992, the cost of the United Kingdom contribution to the UN protection force in the former Yugoslavia was £64,310,000.

Air Training Corps

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Air Training Corps, with particular reference to units in Renfrewshire.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 21 February 1994, *Official Report*, columns *67-68*. Those apply equally to the units in Renfrewshire.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list (1) those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to consult before legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish their response to advice supplied by them;

(2) his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to publish their advice to Government.

Mr. Hanley: There is no statutory requirement for the Government to consult any of MOD's advisory non-departmental public bodies before legislation proposals or to publish any advice that might be provided, or responses to that advice. More recently, however, in line with our commitment to greater oppenness, my Department has placed the report by the National Employer Liaison Committee on the subject of consultation with employers on the future of the armed forces, and a summary of the response by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in the Libraries of both Houses.

South Georgia

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assistance military personnel have given to the refurbishment of the church on South Georgia;

(2) what funds are available for a grant towards the replacement of the windows and painting of the church in South Georgia.

Mr. Hanley: The work to refurbish the church at Grytviken, South Georgia was undertaken by tradesmen of the Royal Engineers who are part of the Falkland Islands field squadron. It was undertaken under the standard rules for military aid to the civil community and no charge was therefore raised for labour. No grant was available to defray the costs of materials used in the refurbishment—£3,100—nor was this sum provided from the defence budget.

Kirkcudbright Test Site

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the reply by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the Member of the European Parliament for South of Scotland on 24 August 1993 regarding depleted uranium testing at the Kirkcudbright test site.

Mr. Aitken: Yes. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Test Ranges

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has reviewed the future of the Defence Research Agency and the proof and experimental establishment at Dundrennan and Eskmead test ranges in regard to work conducted for his Department's testing programme on depleted uranium shells.

Mr. Aitken: The future of all our test and evaluation establishments was recently reviewed by the Director General of Test and Evaluation. Options arising from this are still being considered, but I hope that an announcement can be made in the not-too-distant future. This will be followed by a period of consultation with interested parties.

Volunteer Services

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated total cost of *(a)* the Territorial Army and *(b)* the total volunteer services during the current financial year.

Mr. Hanley: The full cost of maintaining the reserve forces, including such things as equipment development, fuel, ammunition, accommodation and utilities, food or transport, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The figures for pay, allowances, earnings-related national insurance contributions and training bounties are as follows:

	1994-95 estimates £ million
Territorial Army	114·2
Total Volunteer Services	129·8

Those figures exclude the home service part-time element of the Royal Irish Regiment, and the TA non-regular permanent staff.

Territorial Army

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated recruited strength of the Territorial Army at the most recent available date.

Mr. Hanley: The recruited strength of the Territorial Army as at 1 May 1994 was 63,204.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the established strength, including overbearing, of the Territorial Army at the present time.

Mr. Hanley: The estimated strength of the Territorial Army in peacetime is 63,500. We would, however, expect this figure to rise to around 78,000 in times of war.

SCOTLAND

Playing Fields

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what powers he has to call in any planning application which relates to or includes the change of use of playing fields; what steps may be taken by the local community and by the district council to ensure that zoning for recreational purposes in the urban area local plans and the district local plans is adhered to; what powers are enjoyed by regional councils in relation to their role as strategic planning authorities as distinct from their role as property owners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend is empowered by section 32 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 to call in any planning application for his own determination. These powers are exercised sparingly.

As far as district and community interests are concerned, section 18A of the 1972 Act provides that any planning authority must determine planning applications in accordance with the relevant development plans unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Sections 10 and 26 also provide that district authorities must take into account any representations made in their preparation of local plans and in their determining of particular planning applications.

As far as regional interests are concerned, sections 5 to 8 of the 1972 Act provide powers for the preparation of structure plans by the relevant planning authorities, and for their approval by the Secretary of State. Similarly, section 179 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 provides such regional authorities with powers to call in planning applications which are contrary to their approved structure plans or which raise major planning issues of general significance to the districts in question.

Infertility

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the provision for infertility treatment in the Tayside health board area;

(2) what provision is made for infertility investigation in the Tayside health board area;

(3) whether Tayside health board has sought advice from this Department as to the most cost-effective and cost-efficient means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area.

Mr. Stewart: A full range of infertility investigation and treatment is provided in Tayside health board through General Medical Services and at Perth royal infirmary and Ninewells hospital.

Following the publication of the National Medical Advisory Committee report on infertility services in Scotland in March 1993, Tayside health board is examining the needs of its population in relation to infertility services.

Fire Services

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the salary range of each rank of fire service officer in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Relevant information is as follows:

Rank	Salary range Minimum[2] £	Maximum £
(Whole-time operational personnel)[1]		
Firefighter	12,705	15,300
Leading firefighter	17,046	17,745
Sub-officer	17,724	18,852
Station officer	20,559	21,864
Assistant divisional officer	21,669	23,691
Divisional officer III	23,211	24,885
Divisional officer II	24,645	27,318
Divisional officer I	27,219	29,178
Senior divisional officer	29,301	31,608
Assistant firemaster	38,673	[3]—
Firemaster[4]	38,960	68,124
(Whole-time control room personnel)		
Fire control operator	9,876	15,501
Leading fire control operator	13,824	16,548
Senior fire control operator	14,178	17,571
Fire control officer	18,924	20,391
Group fire control officer	21,351	22,872
Principal fire control officer	23,565	25,683

[1] Retained personnel receive an annual retaining fee of from £1,314 to £2,184 together with turn-out and attendance fees. Volunteer personnel receive an hourly fee for authorised duty.

[2] Incremental stages between minima and maxima at most ranks are related to both years of service in rank and total years of service.

[3] The salary scale for an Assistant Firemaster is at 75 per cent. at all points of the scale of the Firemaster except where an Assistant Firemaster is appointed as Deputy Firemaster, in which case the salary scale is at 80 per cent. at all points of the scale of the Firemaster.

[4] The salary range for Firemasters has a minimum and a maximum for each of 9 population bands. The minimum shown is that for the lowest population band of up to 240,000. The maximum is that for the highest band in Scotland of 1,700,001 to 2,300,000.

This table reflects in summary form salary scales agreed by the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades and the National Joint Council for Chief and Assistant Chief Officers of Local Authorities' Fire Brigades.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the identifiable *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue or current expenditure by Strathclyde regional council by regional council electoral division, or on any other geographical basis on which the data is collated or accounted, in each year since 1990; how much in both expenditure categories is (i) legally committed and (ii) planned for fiscal years 1994-95 and 1995-96; what is the pro-rata expenditure in each category for each regional council electoral division, expressed as a percentage of the total capital and revenue budgets measured against their respective populations; if he will rank the regional council electoral divisions in decending order by level of expenditure in both categories; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information about the geographical breakdown of expenditure by Strathclyde regional council is not held by the Scottish Office.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the identifiable *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue or current expenditure by Renfrew district council by regional council electoral division, or on any other geographical basis on which the data is collated or accounted, in each year since 1990; how much in both expenditure categories is (i) legally committed and (ii) planned for fiscal years 1994-95 and 1995-96; what is the pro-rata expenditure in each category for each regional council electoral division, expressed as a percentage of the total capital and revenue budgets measured against their respective populations; if he will rank the regional council electoral divisions in descending order by level of expenditure in both categories; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information about the geographical breakdown of expenditure by the Renfrew district council is not held by the Scottish Office.

Arthritis Care

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of Arthritis Care to discuss needs and concerns of its members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Arthritis Care has not sought a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and he therefore currently has no plans to meet its representatives.

Renfrewshire Enterprise

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his most recent estimate of the population of *(a)* the area covered by Renfrewshire Enterprise, *(b)* each of its three constituent district councils and *(c)* each regional council electoral division within the area.

Mr. Stewart: The Registrar General's latest estimates for *(a)* and *(b)* are as follows. I regret that population estimates are not available for regional council electoral divisions.

Mid-1993 population estimates

	Estimate
(a) Renfrewshire Enterprise area	352,070
(b) Eastwood District	60,930
Inverclyde District	89,990
Renfrew District	201,150

Trespass

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the laws relating to trespass in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Simple trespass is not an offence under the criminal law of Scotland. However, the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865 provides that it is an offence to lodge in private premises or occupy or encamp on private land, without the owner's consent. In addition, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill contains provisions which extend to Scotland and which address certain types of disruptive behaviour often associated with trespass.

As regards the civil law, if someone intrudes on land without permission and without any other legal right to do so then this will constitute trespass under Scots civil law. There are two possible civil remedies open to the owner of the land. An action of ejection would secure the removal of a person from occupying heritable property without right or title hitherto. An action of interdict would seek to prevent a person from doing something, such as returning

to the property. The two processes can be combined in one action, namely an action of ejection of a trespasser and interdict against his or her return.

Dog Registration

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the fee that would be required to be charged to fund a self-financing dog registration scheme in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Government do not believe that a registration scheme would address the main problems associated with dogs. No estimate of the fee which would be required to fund a self-financing scheme in Scotland has been made.

Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the cost of implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 in Scotland; what would be the total annual cost to *(a)* central Government, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* other bodies of full implementation, what would be the total cost expressed in (i) annual and (ii) weekly terms for each (1) council tax payer and (2) taxpayer—including and excluding indirect taxation—when he plans to fully implement the Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information on the estimated cost of implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 in Scotland is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

There are no plans at present to implement sections 1, 2 and 3 of this Act. Most of the major provisions of the Act have been implemented bringing substantial benefits to disabled people and their carers. The requirements of the sections of the Act which have not been implemented are now, to a very large extent, reflected in the new and wide-ranging community care arrangements which demonstrates our commitment to high quality care responsive to the needs and wishes of service users and their carers. We intend to review the situation once we have some years' experience of the community care arrangements.

Council Services (Contracting Out)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he or officers of his Department have had with councillors or officers of Kyle and Carrick district council regarding contracting out of council services; which services were the subject of these discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Scottish Office provides advice to Scottish local authorities regarding the legal context of public procurement. Kyle and Carrick district council has sought general advice about the compulsory competitive tendering legislation and the European Community public procurement directives. Responsibility for placing individual contracts rests entirely with local authorities, who must satisfy themselves that their actions are within the law.

Evening Primrose Oil

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research his Department has funded into the efficacy of evening primrose oil as a treatment for arthritis; in what circumstances evening primrose oil is available on prescription; if he Department intends to fund further research into the value of evening primrose oil for treatment or illness and disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Two evening primrose oil products, Epogam and Efamast, are licensed by the Medicines Control Agency and are prescribable on the NHS. Epogam is prescribable for use in the treatment of atopic eczema, and Efamast for use in the treatment of mastalgia. No evening primrose oil preparation has satisfied the licensing requirements of safety and efficacy for any other medical condition.

The Scottish Office Home and Health Department has not funded, and has no present plans to fund, any research into the value of evening primrose oil for the treatment of arthritis or any other medical condition. However, the Chief Scientist Office of the Scottish Office Home and Health Department is always willing to consider any applications for the funding of soundly based reasearchable projects related to health and health services.

Mr. Andrew Freemantle

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the posts held by Mr. Andrew Freemantle before his appointment to his current position in the Scottish ambulance service.

Mr. Stewart: Prior to his appointment three yeas ago as general manager of the Scottish Ambulance Service Mr. Freemantle served for a number of years as a member of Her Majesty's forces, latterly with the rank of brigadier. Details of his career can be found in "Who's Who in Scotland".

Local Authority Direct Service Organisations

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what restrictions apply to the sale of products to the general public from factories which are wholly or mainly owned by local authorities; if he will bring forward measures to allow local authority direct service organisations to sell manufactured goods designed for house improvement to owner-occupiers who wish to purchase these goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: It is for local authorities, in the first instance, to satisfy themselves that, in the individual circumstances of a particular case, their actions are within the law. The Government have no plans to bring forward measures in relation to direct service organisations and owner occupiers.

Disabled People (Voting Rights)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he takes to ensure that all disabled people are able to exercise their right to vote in elections for which he is responsible; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Section 18(3)(a) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by

the Representation of the People Act 1985, provides that returning officers should designate as polling places, so far as is reasonable and practicable, places which are accessible to disabled voters. The Government also provide financial assistance towards the cost of providing temporary ramps for polling stations to assist access by disabled voters. Guidance on this matter is issued from time to time to returning officers.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* adults and *(b)* young people on average participated in local enterprise company-sponsored training schemes in each month in the past two years; if he will break down these figures into local enterprise company areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Questions relating to the numbers of adults and young people participating in each local enterprise company area are a matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member with the figures requested for each local enterprise company and totals for each of their networks.

Police

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the latest estimate of the *(a)* normal and *(b)* overtime hours spent by police officers giving evidence and waiting to give evidence in each constabulary in Scotland; what was the total cost of this; what is the estimated burden on (i) normal payroll and (ii) overtime budgets expressed in cash terms and as a percentage of each budget; what was the effect of these duties on the ability of officers to be relieved of duties on scheduled rest days; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Current information is not available. The most recent estimate of which the Government are aware is that contained in the report by the Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland entitled "Police Waiting Time at Court". A copy of the report, which was published in November 1992, is in the Library.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the police service and the procurators fiscal service to discuss initiatives to reduce the amount of time police officers spend waiting to give evidence in courts; what was the outcome of these discussions; and what new initiatives he intends to introduce.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government's White Paper—"Firm and Fair—Improving the Delivery of Justice in Scotland" published, following consultation with a wide range of interests, on 27 June contains proposals which should contribute positively to reducing the time all witnesses have to spend in court.

Low Moss Prison

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to extending Low Moss prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no plans to extend Low Moss prison, but the Scottish Prison Service's estates strategy does anticipate that a feasibility study will be carried out at a future date to examine the possibility of replacing the existing hutted prisoner accommodation by the construction of new houseblocks, adjacent to the present site. The study has not yet been commissioned and if, in the light of it, a project were to proceed, planning consent would be necessary and decisions on financing, which have not yet been taken, would be required.

Obscene Publications Branch

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to future national co-ordination between police forces in Scotland, England and Wales on matters relating to pornography and obscenity following the proposed disbanding of the obscene publications branch at Scotland Yard.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 June 1994]:* Each chief constable in Scotland is responsible for the investigation of crime in his force area. Where cross-force crime occurs, collaborative arrangements can be established to deal with it. These arrangements work satisfactorily, and there are no proposals to change existing procedures.

Metropolitan police headquarters functions and specialist units fall within the scope of a restructuring exercise, which aims to make the best possible use of resources and to place functions where they are most appropriate. I understand that no proposals about the future of the Metropolitan police's obscene publications branch have yet been made.

Sandeel Fishing

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what measures he intends to take to protect the livelihoods of East Neuk of Fife fishermen affected by the sandeel fishing of Danish vessels over traditional Fife fishing grounds;

(2) what representations he has made on behalf of East Neuk of Fife fishermen to the Danish Government about the extent of sandeel fishing over traditional Fife fishing grounds.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 June 1994]:* Sandeels are normally caught with only minimal by-catches of other species. By-catches of whitefish species will typically comprise around 1 per cent. of total catch. The European Union also sets maximum levels for by-catches of protected species, such as cod and haddock.

Inspectors from the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency regularly board sandeel vessels to ensure that these by-catch limits are observed. In 1993, there were over 150 such boardings and no cases were found of a breach of the EC by-catch regulations. This year, up to 24 June, 38 boardings had been made of 36 vessels, again without any evident breach of by-catch limits.

All the available evidence indicates that sandeel vessels are operating within the terms of EC regulations. Even so, I recognise the concern in the industry at the possible impact which current levels of sandeel fishing may be having on other fish stocks and on the marine eco-system in general. At last December's Fisheries Council, the United Kingdom persuaded the Council to call for an investigation of the broader effects of industrial fishing. A

working group consisting of fisheries biologists and marine ecologists from all relevant member states is expected to report later this year.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to date of implementing the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* Information on the costs to the police, local authorities, the prosecution and courts of operating the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 is not held centrally.

Regional Enterprise Grants

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the REG awards in Fife on a six-monthly basis from start-up of the scheme specifying the company location, industrial sector, level of award and whether the award was REG (Investment) or REG (Innovation).

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Type of grant	*Travel to work area*	*Standard Industrial Classification (1980)*	*Grant offered £*
Period in which offer accepted: 1 April 1988 to 30 September 1988			
Investment	Dundee	Pulp, paper and board	3,900
Period in which offer accepted: 1 October 1990 to 31 March 1991			
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Textile finishing	14,700
Period in which offer accepted: 1 April 1991 to 30 September 1991			
Investment	Dunfermline	Construction and earth moving equipment	10,050
Investment	Dunfermline	Retail distribution of household goods, etc.	3,253
Investment	Dunfermline	Soft furnishings	1,652
Investment	Dunfermline	Bacon curing and meat processing	3,008
Investment	Dunfermline	Professional and technical services not elsewhere specified	4,200
Investment	Dunfermline	Household textiles	8,519
Investment	Dunfermline	Metal doors, windows, etc.	1,238
Innovation	Dunfermline	Computer services	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Computer services	22,981
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Machinery for working wood, rubber, etc.	25,000
Period in which offer accepted: 1 October 1991 to 31 March 1992			
Investment	Dunfermline	Other printing and publishing	5,325
Investment	Dunfermline	Wholesale distribution of household goods	4,050
Investment	Dunfermline	Electric instruments and control systems	11,182
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Bread and flour confectionery	15,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Steel tubes	12,939
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Metal storage vessels (non industrial)	4,500
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Engineers' small tools	13,900
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Female light outer-ware, lingerie, etc.	6,300
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Computer services	13,448
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Hosiery and other weft knitted goods	9,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Working of stone and non-metal minerals not elsewhere specified	6,600
Innovation	Dunfermline	Optical precision instruments	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Production and distribution of other forms of energy	17,500
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Electronic data processing equipment	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Radio and electronic capital goods	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Business services not elsewhere specified	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Shop and office fitting	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Plastics products not elsewhere specified	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Caravans	25,000
Period in which offer accepted: 1 April 1992 to 30 September 1992			
Investment	Dunfermline	Ceramic goods	3,990
Investment	Dunfermline	Hiring out other moveables	13,503
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Other printing and publishing	15,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Other printing and publishing	12,561
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Production and distribution of electricity	15,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Plastics packaging products	14,546
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Engineers' small tools	8,600
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Other printing and publishing	1,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Electronic data processing equipment	15,000
Innovation	Dunfermline	Computer services	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Mechanical lifting and handling equipment	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Electronic equipment not elsewhere specified	11,250
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Radio and electronic capital goods	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Alarms and signalling equipment	24,971

Type of grant	Travel to work area	Standard Industrial Classification (1980)	Grant offered £
Period in which offer accepted: 1 October 1992 to 31 March 1993			
Investment	Dunfermline	Medical and surgical equipment	11,250
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Bread and flour confectionery	10,050
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Other wholesale distribution	15,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Production and distribution of electricity	15,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Finished metal products not elsewhere specified	15,000
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Compressors and fluid power equipment	15,000
Innovation	Dunfermline	Medical and surgical equipment	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Alarms and signalling equipment	22,659
Period in which offer accepted: 1 April 1993 to 30 September 1993			
Investment	Dunfermline	Retail distribution of books, stationery, etc.	6,409
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Finished metal products not elsewhere specified	9,677
Innovation	Dunfermline	Electronic data processing equipment	25,000
Innovation	Dunfermline	Telegraph, telephone apparatus	25,000
Innovation	Dunfermline	Refrigerating and ventilating equipment	25,000
Innovation	Dunfermline	Wholesale distribution of machinery, etc.	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Other industrial and commercial machinery	25,000
Period in which offer accepted: 1 October 1993 to 31 March 1994			
Investment	Dunfermline	Computer services	15,000
Investment	Dunfermline	General construction/demolition work	15,000
Investment	Dunfermline	Finished metal products not elsewhere specified	1,733
Investment	Dunfermline	Installation of fixtures and fittings	3,747
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Professional and technical services not elsewhere specified	11,250
Innovation	Dundee	Measuring and checking instruments	25,000
Innovation	Dunfermline	Alarms and signalling equipment	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Computer services	22,800
Period in which offer accepted: 1 April 1993 to 23 June 1994			
Investment	Kirkcaldy	Wooden containers	12,559
Innovation	Dunfermline	Optical precision instruments	25,000
Innovation	Kirkcaldy	Sports goods	25,000

Skin Cancer

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have died from skin cancer in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The information is given in the table:

Deaths from skin cancer, Scotland 1979 to 1993

Cause:	Malignant melanoma of skin	Other malignant neoplasm of skin
ICD Code:	172	173
Year		
1979	91	49
1980	67	46
1981	74	56
1982	87	47
1983	90	43
1984	95	27
1985	95	47
1986	104	43
1987	114	44
1988	89	47
1989	109	52
1990	84	49
1991	98	43
1992	102	46
1993[1]	112	49

[1] Provisional.

Alcohol (Prisons)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in which prisons alcohol abuse and misuse programmes are available to prisoners; how many prisoners *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed the programme in each prison in 1991, 1992, 1993 and so far this year; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[pursuant to his reply 15 June 1994, c. 610]:* The chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, has written further to the hon. Member.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 30 June 1994:

I wrote to you on 15 June in response to your question about alcohol abuse and misuse programmes within Scottish penal establishments and undertook to write again when the figures for Barlinnie prison were available.

These are now included in the table attached which, for ease of reference, also repeats the information given in my earlier letter.

Establishment	Alcohol programme run by	1991 [1]Number completed	1992 [1]Number completed	1993 [1]Number completed	1994 To date number completed
Aberdeen	Aberdeen Alcohol Advisory and Counselling Service Prison Social Work Unit	[2]—	[2]—	24	46
Barlinnie	Glasgow Council on Alcohol Alcoholics Anonymous Trained Prison Staff	221	130	81	31
Barlinnie Unit	Glasgow Council on Alcohol	1	2	Nil	Nil
Castle Huntly	Prison Social Worker Prison Education Officer	27	15	30	19
Cornton Vale	Scottish Council on Alcohol Alcoholics Anonymous Trained Prison Staff Prison Social Workers	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	9
Dumfries	Nil (contact is maintained with Alcoholics Anonymous)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Dungavel	Prison Social Work Unit Alcoholics Anonymous	18	40	43	15
Edinburgh	Prison Education Unit Alcoholics Anonymous	28	32	27	18
Friarton	Alcoholics Anonymous Prison Education Unit	10	10	10	4
Glenochil	Alcoholics Anonymous Scottish Council on Alcohol	80	80	80	80
Greenock	Inverclyde Alcohol Project Prison Social Work Unit Alcoholics Anonymous	[2]—	5	15	17
Inverness	Scottish Council on Alcohol	40	40	40	40
Longriggend	Alcoholics Anonymous Prison Social Work Unit Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Addiction and Advisory Centre	259	312	476	113
Low Moss	Prison Addictions Unit Alcoholics Anonymous	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	34
Noranside	Alcoholics Anonymous Tayside Council on Alcohol Prison Education Unit	4	14	19	21
Penninghame	Prison Education Unit Prison Social Work Alcoholics Anonymous Al-teen	[2]—	[2]—	54	12
Perth	Tayside Council on Alcohol Alcoholics Anonymous Prison Social Work Unit	13	21	12	32
Peterhead	Prison Education Unit Alcoholics Anonymous	26	46	80	40
Polmont	Prison Social Work Unit Scottish Council on Alcohol	65	63	42	16
Shotts	Alcoholics Anonymous	30 prisoners attend per week	30 prisoners attend per week	30 prisoners attend per week	30 prisoners attend per week
Shotts Unit	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
TOTAL		792	810	1,033	547

[1] The numbers quoted show the total number of prisoners who completed alcohol programmes. The number of prisoners who commenced but did not complete the programmes is not available.
[2] No figures available.

Note:

The figures do not include the prisoners who receive individual counselling from prison based social workers or community based addiction counsellors.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Middle East

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will define the Government's commitment to the reconstruction of Gaza and Jericho following the middle east peace award *(a)* in terms of financial assistance and *(b)* in terms of technical assistance.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Both financial and technical assistance are needed to support the establishment of a Palestinian administration in Gaza and Jericho. We intend to spend £70 million on aid to the Palestinians, over the three financial years from 1994-95, through our contributions to EC aid programmes and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, as well as bilaterally. The EC assistance includes 10 mecu in 1994 for the start-up costs of the Palestinian police force. Our bilateral aid takes the form of technical assistance, concentrating on providing know-how and institution building.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the public and private financial flows to each country in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Available information is contained in an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication "Geographical Distribution of Financial Flows to Developing Countries—1989 to 1992," a copy of which is available in the Library.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the extent of the emerging famine in southern Sudan;

(2) what assessment he has made of the degree of access that Operation Lifeline Sudan is being given to famine areas in southern Sudan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The World Food Programme estimates that 2·2 million people in the south and the transition zone will need emergency food aid in 1994. Information on access to populations at risk is contained in "The Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance: Issues Facing UN Agencies and NGOs in 1994" a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the causes of the famine in Sudan; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which the causes were man-made.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Failed harvests, primarily due to lack of rain and inappropriate economic and agricultural policies, have resulted in serious food shortages in many areas of both north and south Sudan. The situation has been exacerbated in the south by fighting between the Government and rebel forces, which has displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

Ethiopia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the extent of the famine in Ethiopia;

(2) if he will make a statement on the response of *(a)* the British Government and *(b)* the European Union to the famine in Ethiopia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 10 May, *Official Report*, column *79* and on 23 June, *Official Report*, column *270*. Information on EU member states' pledges is not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 1 July 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Compensation Orders

Mr. Bates: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what was the total amount and number of compensation orders made by *(a)* Teesside Crown court, *(b)* Teesside magistrates court and *(c)* Gainsborough magistrates court in (i) 1990, (ii) 1991, (iii) 1992 and (iv) 1993;

(2) what is the total number and amount of unpaid compensation orders awarded by *(a)* Teesside Crown court, *(b)* Teesside magistrates court and *(c)* Gainsborough magistrates court in (i) 1990, (ii) 1991, (iii) 1992 and (iv) 1993.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department does not hold this information. Information about the numbers of offenders ordered to pay compensation is contained in "Home Office Criminal Statistics England and Wales," copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Disputes

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will support pilot programmes for alternative dispute resolution.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has publicly welcomed the development of private and voluntary dispute resolution services, and their availability to parties who do not need the compulsion, certainty and finality that only the courts provide. The Lord Chancellor is currently evaluating the potential of alternative dispute resolution and the various research options which may assist him.

Small Claims Courts

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he intends to make a provision for costs in the small claims court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Although often referred to as a "no-costs" regime, the small claims procedure does provide for the recovery of some costs, as detailed in order 19, rule 4 of the county court rules. Under this rule, the costs stated on the summons and the costs of enforcing the award may be recovered. In addition, the court may award allowances relating to the party's and witness's expenses and to experts' fees.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many personal injury cases were pursued through the small claims courts in each of the last three years; and if he will place in the Library the number of cases pursued through each such court in the last three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The term "small claims court" refers to the arbitration procedure in the county courts. Until March 1994 only the total number of arbitrations heard in each county court was recorded. Statistics on arbitrations are now collected by nature of claim—for instance, personal injury—and the figures for the last nine months of 1994 will be published in "Judicial Statistics Annual Report 1994".

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the factors causing the rate of unemployment in Bolton to change at a different rate from the rate for the country as a whole in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has made no such explicit assessment. However, I believe that the Department has created the right framework for employers to create jobs and reduce unemployment in Bolton, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. Indeed, I am pleased to see that over the past 12 months unemployment in my hon. Friend's constituency has been falling faster than the national average.

ENVIRONMENT

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his policy to provide financial support towards the costs that will be incurred by people from the United Kingdom invited to participate in the intergovernmental panel on climate change workshop on equity and social considerations to be held in Nairobi in July.

Mr. Atkins: My Department is providing financial support towards the costs incurred by United Kingdom experts who have been invited to act as lead or contributing authors for the IPCC's current work programme, including costs associated with attendance at relevant IPCC workshops. On that basis we are supporting the costs of attendance of one United Kingdom expert at the workshop on equity and social considerations. The Department is not, however, providing support for the attendance of other possible United Kingdom participants at IPCC workshops.

Staff Sickness (Local Authorities)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statistics he collects on days lost through staff sickness in local authorities.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is not collected by this Department.

Ornithology

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of funding is provided by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to the British Trust for Ornithology; and what this figure is as a proportion of the British Trust for Ornithology's total expenditure for each of the last four years.

Mr. Atkins: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee's contract with BTO will be worth £414,000

this year. Figures comparing the value of the contract and the trust's expenditure over the last four financial years are as follows:

£ thousands

	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
BTO Expenditure	1,024	1,660	1,225	N/a
Value of JNCC contract	301	365	399	393
Contract as percentage of BTO expenditure	29·4	22·0	32·6	—

N/a—Not available.
Figures for 1990-91 are for BTO's contract with the former NCC.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost of administering the statutory bird-ringing scheme and licensing activities which are contracted out to the British Trust for Ornithology in 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Atkins: The British Trust for Ornithology operates a national bird-ringing scheme under contract from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. This scheme is not statutory. In 1993-94, funding from the JNCC amounted to approximately £112,000. In 1994-95, funding will be about £138,000. The BTO is licensed by English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage to issue permits for ringing or marking birds or examining any ring or mark.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the funding of the British Trust for Ornithology.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has received three written representations about the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's contract with the British Trust for Ornithology for the provision of bird-ringing data, including one from the hon. Member.

Biodiversity

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are now being taken to monitor and evaluate biodiversity in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity in the United Kingdom are described in "Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan", Cm. 2428. A steering group, chaired by my Department, has a remit which includes reviewing and reporting on existing and future monitoring programmes. The steering group is assisted by a specialist sub-group on data, chaired by the chief officer, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which is seeking to improve the accessibility and co-ordination of existing biological datasets and the integration of monitoring studies and programmes.

HEALTH

Health Commissions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health commissions are in operation; what are their functions; what is the estimated cost of each one; which health authorities have such commissions; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: All district health authorities and family health services authorities are developing close links in response to Government policy on integrated working.

Disciplinary Procedures

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what documents her Department has produced in the last year; what is the process of production in the disciplinary procedures against doctors; and when she will publish them.

Dr. Mawhinney: Documents from the Department are issued on a wide range of issues.

We are consulting representatives of national health service management and the medical and dental professions on guidance relating to suspensions and disciplinary action involving hospital medical and dental and community medical staff. Guidance will be issued to NHS employing bodies in due course.

Pensions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria she uses to decide whether those who have transferred from national health service to private pensions are better or worse off as a result.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses, doctors and other national health service employees by category have transferred their pensions from national health service to private schemes in each year since 1986.

Dr. Mawhinney: The table shows the total number of national health service employees who have transferred accrued pension rights from the national health service pension scheme to private schemes in each year since August 1989. Data are not available before that date and are not held by occupational groups. The majority of these transfers relate to former members of the scheme who have left national health service employment.

	Number
[1]1989	2,027
1990	6,938
1991	7,852
1992	8,434

[1] Figure from August 1989.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of money given as inducement to transfer from a national health service to a private pension in each year since 1986.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Child Records

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities are using patient-held child records.

Mr. Bowis: Information from the British Paediatric Association, which has produced a model personal child

health record, shows that currently 101 health authorities or national health service trusts are contracting for copies of the record. On the basis of the information from the BPA we estimate that the proportion of children issued with personal child health records has increased by about 25 per cent. in the last year.

Ethnic Minority Staff

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific policies or mechanisms were implemented as part of the programme of action for ethnic minority staff in the national health service launched on 10 December 1993.

Dr. Mawhinney: The programme of action is for national health service trusts and health authorities to implement locally.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the provision for *(a)* infertility investigation and *(b)* infertility treatment in the North West regional health authority;

(2) what discussions have been held between the North West regional health authority and her Department as to the most cost-effective means of providing for infertility investigation and treatment in its area.

Mr. Sackville: For the information requested about infertility investigation and treatment in the North West region the hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Wilson, chairman of the North West regional health authority.

There have been no discussions on this matter between the North West regional health authority and the Department. The national health service provides a wide range of treatments for subfertility. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 18 May, *Official Report*, column *520*.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to visit Queen Mary's hospital, Sidcup and Erith and district hospital, Erith.

Mr. Sackville: Ministers have no current plans to visit Queen Mary's Sidcup Hospital national health service trust.

Press and Public Relations

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) of 2 March, *Official Report*, column *763*, how many press releases were issued by NHS trusts in each of the last three years; and if she will list those trusts with a named press officer or contact on those releases.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private psychiatric hospital beds there were for each year since 1979; and how many of those beds were for children.

Mr. Bowis: The number of psychiatric beds in private hospitals, homes and clinics registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984 is shown in the table for the years 1982 to 1992-93. On average, fewer than 100 beds per year are allocated specifically to children.

	Number
1982	1,994
1983	2,394
1984	2,176
1985	2,340
1986	3,165
1987-88	4,507
1988-89	5,864
1989-90	7,693
1990-91	10,722
1991-92	12,653
1992-93	16,946

The bulk of this growth is to cater for the needs of elderly mentally ill people.

Source: 1982-86 SBH212 returns. 1987-88 to 1992-93 KO36 return. Information not available prior to 1982.

Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of redundancy payments for local authority social services departments, by authority, for the last financial year.

Mr. Bowis: Returns from social services departments do not separately identify such payments.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the amount spent on consultants' fees by social services departments during the last financial year, by authority.

Mr. Bowis: Returns from social services departments do not separately identify consultants' fees.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what annual rate of reduction in hospital beds she has assumed for the next eight years; and what assessment she has made of the likely impact of such reductions on patient care.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him and the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 28 June, *Official Report*, column *536*. We have made no such assumptions. The disposition and number of hospital beds is a matter for local determination. However, we confidently expect that future developments in medical science and technology and in clinical practice will enable an increasing number of patients to be treated as day cases or in their own homes, leading to reductions in the number of hospital beds required, continuing the trend in evidence since 1960.

Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Mr. Sackville: The council's role is determined by the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Acts of 1979 and

1992. It was reconstituted on 1 April 1993 so as to be directly accountable to the professions that it represents. We have no plans at present to change these arrangements.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings and communications she has had with officials of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in the last three months.

Mr. Sackville: My noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, met the president of the council on 19 April to discuss its proposals for post-registration education and practice, and officials maintain regular contact with the council on a range of issues.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will indicate her responsibilities in relation to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for appointing one third of the council's members and for making orders relating to its constitution and statutory functions.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to set up an inquiry into the running and function of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Mr. Sackville: None. It is for the council to determine its methods of working.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, for each NHS trust in the former Northern region, those chairmen and non-executive directors who live outside the boundaries of the district health authority in which that trust is situated.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Some 151 or 77 per cent. of the 197 chairmen and non-executive directors appointed to national health service trusts within the former Northern region live within the boundaries of the district health authority in which that trust is situated. The names of the appointees who live outside the relevant district health authority boundaries are:

Cheviot and Wansbeck NHS Trust
Miss C. E. Thompson

City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Mrs. R. M. Blacklock
Mrs. A. M. Mason
Mr. E. Timmins

Cleveland Ambulance NHS Trust
Mr. T. Weastell
Ms S. Bush

Community Healthcare, North Durham NHS Trust
Mr. J. B. Williams

Darlington Memorial Hospital NHS Trust
Mrs. C. E. Griffen

Durham County Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Mr. D. D'Arcy

Gateshead Healthcare NHS Trust
Mr. P. Smith
Ms P. Remfrey
Mr. D. Mitford

Gateshead Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. C. N. Morton
Mrs. N. E. Cookson
Mrs. A. S. Cooper
Mr. D. Irwin
Miss M. Davies

Hartlepool Community Care NHS Trust
Mr. T. A. Lough

Newcastle City Health NHS Trust
Lady S. Irvine
Sir B. Tomlinson
Mrs. D. M. Jenkins

North Durham Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. C. P. Douglas
Mr. D. F. Henlet
Mr. G. W. Hook
Ms A. Cottman

Northgate and Prudhoe NHS Trust
Professor J. Rear

Northumberland Mental Health NHS Trust
Mrs. J. Turner

Northumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Mrs. S. E. Craig

Priority Healthcare Wearside NHS Trust
Mr. J. L. Mills
Mr. K. Parkinson

Royal Victoria Infirmary and Hexham NHS Trust
Mrs. A. G. Galbraith
Mrs. S. Wilson
Miss A. Willis
Mrs. K. Brunton
Mr. P. Stoddart

South Durham Healthcare NHS Trust
Mr. J. V. Parsons
Mr. R. J. Winter

South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. D. Collier

South Tees Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
Dr. S. Miller
Mr. J. F. Wilson

South Tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust
Mrs. F. M. Walker
Mr. M. C. Wright

South West Durham Mental Health NHS Trust
Mr. P. Briggs
Mr. D. Bright
Mr. N. T. Hart

Westmorland Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. G. A. Turnbull

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, for each national health service trust in the former East Anglian region, those chairmen and non-executive directors who live outside the boundaries of the district health authority in which that trust is situated.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* Some 99, or 84 per cent., of the 118 chairmen and non-executive directors appointed to national health service trusts within the former East Anglian region live within the boundaries of the district health authority in which that trust is

situated. The names of the appointees who live outside the relevant district health authority boundaries are given as follows:

Addenbrookes Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. C. J. Mellor

Allington NHS Trust
Ms S. Rendall

Anglian Harbours NHS Trust
Mrs. K. Currie
Mr. M. J. Barnard
Mrs. D. H. Addison
Mr. M. Upcroft

Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust
Mr. A. Cumber
Mr. J. Barrett

James Paget Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. N. Johnson
Mr. N. Brighouse
Mrs. L. M. Handford

Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. E. Hubbard
Mr. T. F. Shephard
Mrs. P. A. Jeffery

Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust
Mr. A. Holden

Papworth Hospital NHS Trust
Sir D. Williams
Mr. A. R. Tyrrell
Mr. P. Pemberton

West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. R. Allan

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of state for Health if she will list, for each NHS trust in the former Wessex region, those chairmen and non-executive directors who live outside the boundaries of the district health authority in which that trust is situated.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 June 1994]:* Some 135, or 89 per cent., of the 151 chairmen and non-executive directors appointed to National Health Service trusts within the former Wessex region live within the boundaries of the district health authorities in which that trust is situated. The names of the appointees who live outside the relevant district health authority boundaries are listed.

Swindon and Marlborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. Vyv Attwood
Mrs. Victoria Pickering

Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
Mrs. Elizabeth Broderick
Mr. David D'Arcy Hughes

Southampton Community Services NHS Trust
Mrs. Jane Buchanan

Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust
Mrs. Sheila Collins
Mr. Sydney Jackson
Miss Jane Manning

Bath and West Community NHS Trust
Mrs. Gillian Corney

North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Madame Anne de Montpensier-Budd
Mrs. Annette Moor
Mr. Andrew Prince

Salisbury Health Care NHS Trust
Mrs. Helena Feltham

Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Ms Kay Glendinning

Wiltshire Ambulance NHS Trust
Dr. John Moxon

Portsmouth Health Care NHS Trust
Mrs. Sue Todd

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each NHS trust, in the former South Western region, those chairmen and non-executive directors who live outside the boundaries of the district health authority in which that trust is situated.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* Some 127, or 94 per cent., of the 135 chairmen and non-executive directors appointed to national health service trusts within the former South Western region live within the boundaries of the district health authorities in which that trust is situated. The names of the appointees who live outside the relevant district health authority boundaries are listed.

Southmead NHS Trust
Professor Ian Silver

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Sir Vernon Seccombe

Plymouth Community Services NHS Trust
Mr. Eric Distin

East Somerset NHS Trust
Mr. Timothy Chappel
Mr. John Keegan
Mr. Thomas George

Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust
Lady Sonia Hornby
Mr. Gerard Lane

Necrotising fasciitis

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list research projects into *(a)* vaccination and *(b)* other preventive measures against necrotising fasciitis in British hospitals and universities in the past 10 years; and what consultations she has had with the chief medical officer of health and the Medical Research Council concerning their assessment and funding.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* Necrotising fasciitis is a very rare condition which may be caused by a large number of different infections. For this reason, it is not feasible to develop a single vaccine against necrotising fasciitis. It is difficult to envisage the circumstances in which a vaccine might be useful against such a rare condition, which is associated with varying aetiological organisms.

There is a large body of research on the prevention of hospital-acquired infection of all types, which would include prevention of infections that might cause post-operative necrotising fasciitis.

There is considerable general research into infection with group A streptococci, the organism which was the cause of the recent cases of necrotising fasciitis in Gloucestershire.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly consults the Chief Medical Officer and others about research matters.

For details of Medical Research Council research into necrotising fasciitis, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 14 June, *Official Report*, column *434*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Talks

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on which dates the Minister of State met representatives of each of the major constitutional parties since 1 September 1993 to discuss political developments in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: Since 1 September 1993, I have had meetings with the main Northern Ireland parties on the following dates:

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	*Ulster Democratic Unionist Party (UDUP)*	*Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)*	*Alliance Party*
25 September 1993	1 October 1993	22 September 1993	15 September 1993
11 November 1993	22 October 1993	21 October 1993	20 October 1993
13 January 1994	—	24 January 1994	18 January 1994
7 March 1994	—	12 April 1994	24 February 1994
14 April 1994	—	—	—

I have also attended meetings between the Prime Minister and the UDUP on 9 November 1993 and 21 March 1994, and between my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and the Alliance party on 22 March 1994.

Disabled Voters

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he takes to ensure that all disabled people are able to exercise their right to vote in elections for which he is responsible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Section 14 (4) *(d)* of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 as substituted by article 6(1) of the Electoral Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 requires the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to prepare polling station schemes. Such a scheme can require the provision of facilities to be made available for the disabled. The Government also provide financial assistance towards the cost of providing temporary ramps for access at polling stations and, in addition, disabled people may take advantage of the arrangements for postal and proxy voting should they find this more convenient.

Tourism

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tourist visitors there are in each council area, by such categories as are convenient; and what is his estimate of the number of day trippers to each council area for each of the last three years.

Mr. Tim Smith: The table indicates estimated total visitor numbers to each council area for 1991, 1992 and 1993. Figures are not available for day trippers.

Thousands

Council area	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Antrim	73·1	65·1	59·7
Ards	93·5	78·9	82·3
Armagh	52·8	39·4	39·1
Ballymena	52·8	45·3	51·4
Ballymoney	14·2	15·8	14·4
Banbridge	14·2	13·8	12·3
Belfast	341·3	339·1	331·2
Carrickfergus	20·3	19·7	20·6
Castlereagh	8·1	7·9	10·3
Coleraine	282·4	270·1	267·4
Cookstown	30·5	23·7	22·6
Craigavon	44·7	43·4	41·1
Derry	79·2	74·9	82·3
Down	172·7	187·3	187·2
Dungannon	24·4	21·7	20·6
Fermanagh	136·1	126·2	146·0
Larne	81·3	74·9	82·3
Limavady	28·4	29·6	32·9
Lisburn	52·8	53·2	51·4
Magherafelt	16·3	11·8	12·3
Moyle	117·8	126·2	123·4
Newry and Mourne	85·3	92·7	107·0
Newtownabbey	50·8	53·2	59·7
North Down	103·6	110·4	141·9
Omagh	30·5	27·6	30·9
Strabane	24·4	19·7	26·7

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Iron and Steel Industry

Mr. Bates: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by how many the number of jobs in the British iron and steel industry changed in each successive year since 1979; and what was the output in million tonnes of the British iron and steel industry in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury: The figures are as follows:

Year	Employment in the iron and steel industry (thousands)	Percentage change year on year	Pig iron production (million tonnes)	Crude steel production (million tonnes)
1979	156·6	-5·32	12·9	21·5
1980	112·1	-28·42	6·3	11·3
1981	88·2	-21·32	9·6	15·6
1982	74·5	-15·53	8·4	13·7
1983	63·7	-14·50	9·6	15·0
1984	61·9	-2·83	9·6	15·1
1985	59·0	-4·68	10·5	15·7
1986	55·9	-5·25	9·8	14·7
1987	54·9	-1·79	12·1	17·4
1988	55·1	0·36	13·2	19·0
1989	53·8	-2·36	12·8	18·7
1990	50·8	-5·58	12·5	17·8
1991	45·1	-11·22	12·1	16·5
1992	40·8	-9·53	11·7	16·2
1993	40·2	-1·47	11·6	16·5

Source: ISSB.

Notes:

(1) All figures are based on ECSC figures.

(2) The figure for pig iron production should not be added to the crude steel production figures to give a total figure as this would involve double counting.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the public moneys which have been devoted to sustaining the engineering steel industries of each of the other EC states in each of the last three years and of the sums which will be so expended during 1994-95.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is insufficient information available on which to base a reliable estimate.

Receivers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to preventing accountants who have acted as advisers to banks from acting as receivers of client companies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have considered the arguments for and against preventing accountants who act as advisers to banks from acting as receivers of client companies and I am not convinced that the practice should be proscribed.

Post Office

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made as to the possibility of a conflict of interest arising from the business relationship between the Post Office and Lex Service Group for the chief executive of the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is satisfied that there is no conflict of interest.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he was consulted over the appointment of the chief executive of the Post Office as a non-executive director of the Lex Service Group.

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the advice of his Department has been sought over commercial relations between Lex Service Group and the Post Office in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: No, nor would my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade expect to be consulted. Such matters are within the operational responsibilities of the Post Office.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the maximum level of dust measured at each colliery operated by British Coal during each of the last three years.

Mr. Eggar: This information is held by British Coal. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Fire Safety

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recommendations the inter-departmental scrutiny team has made to Ministers regarding the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the publication of the report of the inter-departmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement on 22 June, *Official Report*, columns *228-29*.

The report makes a number of recommendations for change, including some proposals which may affect the operation of the Children Act 1989 and the Registered Homes Act 1984 or premises covered by them. As my right hon. Friend made clear on 22 June, the Government are committed to full consultation with all interested parties before any changes are made to existing arrangements.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with the industry's regulator about the profits of regional electricity companies.

Mr. Eggar: Ministers meet the Director General of Electricity Supply regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. I understand that the director general will take the

financial circumstances of the companies into account as part of his review of the regional electricity companies' distribution price controls.

EDUCATION

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to consult prior to legislation proposals; and in respect of which bodies the Government must publish their response to advice supplied by them;

(2) if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which have a statutory base;

(3) if he will list the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are required to lay their annual reports before Parliament;

(4) if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to produce annual reports;

(5) if he will list his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which are required to publish their advice to Government.

Mr. Boswell: On the assumption that the hon. Member is using the definition of an advisory non-departmental public body adopted for the document "Public Bodies 1993", there are no such bodies which fall to be listed.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list any advisory bodies which he has set up in his Department since the publication of "Public Bodies 1993."

Mr. Boswell: None.

Special Educational Needs

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the effect of his Department's funding of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal on other education budgets.

Mr. Forth: None. The running costs of the tribunal will be met by this Department, which will itself benefit from some consequent savings in its own running costs. The Welsh Office will contribute in respect of the tribunal's activities in Wales.

Bullying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action his Department is taking on bullying in primary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend is concerned to ensure that all schools treat the issue of bullying seriously and take steps to combat it promptly and firmly wherever and whenever it occurs. We have taken a number of measures to help schools to tackle bullying.

In 1992, the Department issued the "Action Against Bullying" pack to all schools in England. We have stressed the importance of effective action on bullying in the guidance on pupil behaviour and discipline, published on 27 May as part of the "Pupils With Problems" series of circulars. We have recently published leaflets of guidance for pupils and parents on the theme of "Don't Suffer in Silence", and will be making available soon to all television channels a public information film on the same theme. In addition, we intend to publish in the autumn further practical guidance for schools in England based on DFE-funded research at Sheffield university into strategies against bullying.

Nursery Education

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of three and four-year-old children attend a state-run nursery school or nursery class in each local education authority area in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on pupils under five being taught in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools in each local education authority in Yorkshire and Humberside in January 1993 is shown in the table.

Provision of education for under fives in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools for each LEA in Yorkshire and Humberside January 1993

Local Education Authority	Percentage of population at 31 December 1992	
	Nursery schools	Nursery classes in primary schools
Barnsley	3	47
Doncaster	0	41
Rotherham	6	39
Sheffield	7	38
Bradford	4	40
Calderdale	0	34
Kirklees	5	36
Leeds	1	45
Wakefield	5	45
Humberside	5	34
North Yorkshire	2	19

Primary Schools

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many primary schools there are of fewer than 20 pupils in each of the English county authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of maintained primary schools with fewer than 20 pupils in each of the non-metropolitan counties in England in January 1993 is shown in the table.

Maintained primary schools with less than 20 pupils in non-metropolitan counties in England in January 1993

LEA	Number
Avon	1
Bedfordshire	1
Berkshire	0
Buckinghamshire	2
Cambridgeshire	0
Cheshire	0
Cleveland	0
Cornwall	3
Cumbria	1
Derbyshire	3
Devon	3
Dorset	0
Durham	0

LEA	Number
East Sussex	0
Essex	0
Gloucestershire	2
Hampshire	0
Hereford and Worcester	0
Hertfordshire	0
Humberside	0
Isle of Wight	0
Isles of Scilly	2
Kent	0
Lancashire	3
Leicestershire	0
Lincolnshire	1
Norfolk	5
North Yorkshire	5
Northamptonshire	1
Northumberland	9
Nottinghamshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Shropshire	3
Somerset	0
Staffordshire	2
Suffolk	1
Surrey	2
Warwickshire	0
West Sussex	0
Wiltshire	1

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many primary schools of fewer than 20 pupils were judged to have failed to meet educational standards in inspections during 1993.

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the indpendent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Professor Sutherland to write the hon. Member.

National Curriculum

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish a table outlining the costs of implementing the national curriculum; what are the costs so far of the current review procedure; and what is the forecast cost of the national curriculum subjects to be implemented in September 1995.

Mr. Robin Squire: The main elements of direct Government expenditure since 1988 on developing and implementing the national curriculum in England are as follows (in £ million):

	1988-94 (outturn)	*1994-95 (estimate)*
Grants for Education, Support and Training (GEST):	457	93
Government grants to:		
National Curriculum Council:	37	—
School Examinations and Assessment Council:	66	—
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority:	21	32
Direct expenditure by the Department for Education:	29	8
Totals	611	133

Notes:

1. GEST is mainly in respect of books, equipment, training and assessment related to the basic curriculum as a whole (that is the National Curriculum, including information technology plus religious education and sex education).
2. Grants to the NCC and SEAC cover the period from 15 August 1988 to 31 December 1993. The grant to SEAC includes some elements attributable to Wales.
3. Grants to SCAA cover the period from 1 October 1993 to 31 March 1995. The grant in 1993-94 includes some elements attributable to Wales.
4. Direct expenditure by the DFE excludes staff costs and grants to the NCC, SEAC and SCAA.

The cost of the review of the national curriculum in England is estimated at £9·3 million. This includes:

(i) £755,000 for the interim and final Dearing reports on the national curriculum,

(ii) £528,000 for work on slimming down the curriculum by SCAA and its advisory groups (excluding SCAA internal staff costs),

(iii) an estimated £2 million for the current consultation on the revised curriculum proposals (including the cost of publishing and distributing the consultation documents and a report on the outcome of consultation), and

(iv) an estimated £6 million for the publication and distribution of the final subject documents in January 1995 (excluding staff costs).

These estimates are subsumed within the expenditure figures for NCC, SCAA and DFE above.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many complaints were received by his Department about *(a)* the Government's advertisements for grant-maintained status which appeared in January and February and *(b)* the information published by governing bodies about grant-maintained status in the run-up to a ballot taking place.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has received 61 letters concerning the advertising campaign, of which 54 have been letters of complaint. These figures include letters from correspondents who have written on more than one occasion.

Over the past 18 months, the Department has received 13 complaints about the accuracy of information disseminated by governing bodies prior to school ballots for grant-maintained status.

Assessment and Testing

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his plans are for the assessment and testing of seven, 11 and 14-year-olds in 1995; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: High educational standards are of crucial importance for our children and to improve our international competitiveness. The chairman of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Sir Ron Dearing, has confirmed that the tests are educationally sound and the independent school inspectorate, Ofsted, has found that they are raising standards. The Government are determined that these benefits should be extended to all state schools in 1995. To that end, I propose to introduce next year a system of external marking and, where appropriate, additional supply cover. These arrangements will ensure that the tests are marked to tough and objective standards by outside agencies and that the results are made available quickly.

The 1995 assessment and testing arrangements

Detailed proposals for assessing and testing seven, 11 and 14-year-olds next year are set out in a consultation

document to be published today. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is making parallel and appropriate arrangements. We shall continue with mandatory tests for seven and 14-year-olds and, as already announced, introduce mandatory national tests for 11-year-olds following this summer's large-scale pilot. As an integral part of these arrangements, teachers will also make their own assessment of pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science to set alongside the test results.

The tests focus on the vital basics of English, mathematics and science and are therefore unaffected by changes to the curriculum. There has been extensive teacher involvement in their development, which will ensure that the tests are fair and appropriate for all pupils, while remaining rigorous.

Teachers' work load

In order to meet concerns about work load, the tests have already been streamlined. The time taken up by testing was halved in 1994 compared with the year before and the marking and administration were greatly

However, I intend to take more radical action. I propose to:

- introduce external marking for the tests of 11 and 14-year-olds.
- fund supply cover for teachers of seven-year-olds engaged on administering tests and for any teachers of 11 and 14-year-olds responsible for administering practical classroom tests to the least able pupils in these age groups;
- end mandatory external audit of teachers' own assessments of classroom work—although audit of teachers' marking of the English and mathematics tests for seven-year olds will continue.

Taken together, these steps mean that there can be no possible defensible case for industrial action against the tests. The ending of mandatory audit of teachers' own assessments places increased reliance on their professional judgment so far as their own direct area of responsibility is concerned. Although many more schools carried out the tests this year, a substantial number did not, allegedly on the grounds that they involved excessive work load. The arrangements for external marking and supply cover will now remove any vestige of a case on work load grounds for not carrying out the tests in 1995. Parents will not understand if, with no plausible argument based on work load, the demonstrable benefits of testing are denied to pupils because of ideological opposition by some teachers who refuse, in clear breach of their contractual duties, to simply hand out papers and invigilate examinations.

Accountability

A key function of the assessments and tests is to promote accountability to parents. In line with the parents charter, schools will therefore be required to report children's results to parents and to publish the school's overall results in all prospectuses and governers' annual reports. The new arrangements will ensure that schools receive results of their pupils' performance in the tests promptly. The results of seven and 14-year-olds will not be included in school performance tables. It remains the Government's policy that results of 11-year-olds should be included once the tests are established.

Results in national curriculum assessments provide an objective and reliable measure of a school's performance. That is the kind of hard information that I need when considering how to allocate scarce public resources. The results also complement the detailed published Ofsted reports on individual schools. If they are not available, I shall have to discuss with Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools the future format and pattern of inspections.

This is a package designed to raise standards. It will ensure that all pupils are tested in the basics at seven, 11 and 14. It will ensure that tests are marked objectively and rigorously. It will ensure that parents receive prompt and robust information about the strengths and weaknesses of their children's performance.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yemen

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international action is being taken to protect and care for civilian casualties of the Yemeni war in Aden.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Security Council of the United Nations adopted on 29 June a second resolution, No. 931, expressing its deep concern at the humanitarian situation and requesting the Secretary-General to urgently address the needs of those affected by the conflict, in particular the inhabitants of Aden. The International Committee of the Red Cross is active in Yemen, including Aden, and we have responded to its appeal for donations.

Israel

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government about the effect of new Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights on the peace process.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We regularly raise the issue of settlements with our Israeli interlocutors. We welcome recent signs of progress on the Syrian track and Prime Minister Rabin's statements that his Government are prepared to dismantle settlements for peace. We consider all settlements in the occupied territories to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals over retirement age are in receipt of an invalidity addition to their pension.

Mr. Scott: At 4 April 1992, the latest date for which information is available, there were 47,000 invalidity benefit recipients over pension age also receiving an invalidity allowance[1]. At 30 September 1993, the latest date for which information is available, there were 128,000 retirement pensioners receiving an increase of retirement pension for invalidity under section 47 of the Social Security (Contributions and Benefits) Act 1992[2].

[1] Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Based on a 10 per cent. sample of retirement pensioners, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to publish details of the performance and targets of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The Child Support Agency's annual report for 1993-94 and business plan for 1994-95 will be published on Monday 4 July. Copies will be available in the Vote Office from 10.30 am.

Mine Workers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications have been considered under the scheme to provide compensation for former mine workers who suffer from serious bronchitis and emphysema; how many of those have been accepted; and how many were secured and accepted in each region.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. The following table gives the information by Benefits Agency area directorate as at 19 June 1994, not all the claims received would have been decided by that date:

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema (PD D12) by Area Directorate

Area	*Claims received*	*[1]Disallowed on employment grounds*	*[2]Disallowed on medical grounds*	*[3]Assessed at 14 per cent. or over disabled*
South				
Anglia	24	4	4	3
Chilterns	22	5	3	0
South East	449	28	304	31
West Country	147	8	41	4
Wales and Central England				
East Midlands	5,328	109	3,791	461
Greater Manchester	313	13	225	29
Lancashire and Cumbria	2,165	116	1,418	123
Merseyside	472	22	329	35
Midlands South West	624	26	449	48
Wales	8,696	543	5,469	1,152
West Mercia	3,532	180	2,318	324
Scotland and North				
East Scotland	2,366	79	1,867	85
Glasgow	233	12	94	8
North and West Yorkshire	2,511	83	1,757	339
North, Central and West Scotland	1,870	84	1,520	49
South Yorkshire and Humberside	6,272	141	4,504	671
Tyne Tees	6,889	135	5,555	517
Grand Total	41,913	1,588	29,648	3,879

[1] Claims disallowed on employment grounds are those where the customer had not worked underground in a coal mine for a period of at least 20 years.
[2] Claims disallowed on medical grounds include—customers with insufficient lung function loss; where category 1 pneumoconiosis has not been diagnosed, and those where chronic bronchitis and/or emphysema has not been diagnosed.
[3] Claims assessed at 14 per cent. or more will result in an award of benefit.

Note:
Not all claims received would have been decided by 19 June 1994.
Based on a 100 per cent. count and subject to amendment.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Desertification

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much additional funding will be made available by the United Kingdom to assist in the implementation of the international convention to combat desertification.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are currently providing substantial funding to assist developing countries to combat desertification. The provision of any additional funding will depend on the extent to which those of our developing country partners that ratify the convention implement the approaches it promotes. Funding decisions will also depend on the degree of priority that they give to such activities in relation to other projects and programmes proposed by them for our support.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the implementation of the international convention to combat desertification.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The text of the convention was adopted on 18 June. It is likely to come into force next year.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the United Kingdom has to ratify the international convention to combat desertification.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are studying the provisions of the convention. No decision has been taken on signature or ratification.

Nigeria

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to resist the imposition by the European Community

and other international bodies of further economic and political sanctions against Nigeria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls) and to her on 29 June, *Official Report*, columns *684-85*.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the extent to which repressive press decrees imposed following the annulment of the June 1993 presidential election in Nigeria have now been repealed; and what response he has made to such repeals.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Most of the repressive press decrees have been repealed; we welcomed those moves. However, two publishing houses were shut down by the military Government in the run-up to the anniversary of the 12 June 1993 election. We are concerned by this, and urge the military to reverse this repressive action.

TREASURY

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a table showing for *(a)* each year since 1987, *(b)* each quarter since 1991 and *(c)* each month since October 1992 the value, volume and unit value for United Kingdom imports and exports of manufactures with EEC, non-EEC countries and world trade in semi-manufactures, finished manufactures and manufactures on a balance of payments basis to take account of the latest statistical revisions;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1987, each quarter since 1991 and each month since October 1992 the levels of United Kingdom overseas trade in consumer goods, intermediate goods and capital goods with EC, non-EC countries and total trade on a balance of payments basis to take account of the latest statistical revisions;

(3) if he will publish a table showing for *(a)* each year since 1987, *(b)* each quarter since 1991 and *(c)* each month since October 1992 the value of United Kingdom imports and exports of consumer goods, intermediate goods and capital goods with EEC, non-EEC countries and total trade on a balance of payments basis to take account of the latest statistical revisions.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* The information requested is available on the Central Statistical Office database, which can be accessed through the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for 1968, 1973, 1979 and 1988 the ratio of exports to sales of manufactures of consumer goods, intermediate goods and capital goods as described in table B6 of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" on the same statistical basis as in ratio 3 of table 15·10 of the April 1991 "Monthly Digest of Statistics" together with his best estimate of the corresponding figures for the years 1989 to 1993 and this year to date.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a table showing for countries other than the EC 12 for 1968, 1973, 1979 and 1988 the ratio of imports to home demand for manufactures on the same basis as in ratio 1 of table 15.10 of the April 1991 "Monthly Digest of Statistics" together with his best estimate of the corresponding figures for the years 1989 to 1993 and this year to date;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for countries other than the EC 12 for 1968, 1973, 1979 and 1988 the ratio of exports to sales of manufactures on the same basis as in ratio 3 of table 15.10 of the April 1991 "Monthly Digest of Statistics" together with his best estimate of the corresponding figures for the years 1989 to 1993 and this year to date;

(3) if he will publish a table showing for the EC Twelve for *(a)* 1968, *(b)* 1973, *(c)* 1979 and *(d)* 1988 the ratio of imports to home demand for manufactures on the same basis as in ratio 1 of table 15.10 of the April 1991 monthly digest of statistics together with his best estimate of the corresponding figures for each year since 1989 and the current year to date.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for 1968, 1973, 1979 and 1988 the ratio of imports to home demand for manufactures on the same basis as in ratio 1 of table 15.10 of the April 1991 "Monthly Digest of Statistics" together with his best estimate of the corresponding figures for the years 1989 to 1993 and this year to date.

Mr. Nelson: This ratio was first published by the Central Statistical Office in an article published in the August 1977 edition of *Economic Trends*, presenting data on this and other ratios for the period 1968 and 1976. Comparable estimates for later periods have already been published in CSO "Business Monitor MQ12—Import Penetration and Export Sales Ratios for Manufacturing Industry," as well as in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics." Copies of both are available in the House of Commons Library. However, calculation of the ratio involves the use of quarterly sales information from manufacturing industry. The collection of such information was stopped in line with recommendations made in the 1989 review of Department of Trade and Industry statistics. As such, the most recent estimates for the ratio cover the 12-month period to end-June 1989, and are as published in the April 1991 edition of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" Estimates for more recent periods are not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for *(a)* each year since 1987, *(b)* each quarter since 1991 and *(c)* each month since October 1992 the volume of United Kingdom imports and exports of consumer goods, intermediate goods and capital goods with EEC, non-EEC countries and total trade on a balance-of-payments basis to take account of the latest statistical revisions.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* The information requested is being placed in the House of Commons Library in a table entitled "Volume Indices of Exports of Consumer, Intermediate and Capital Goods—Balance of Payments Consistent."

Market Testing

Mr. Radice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Departments which achieve savings through market testing and contracting out will be able to apply those savings for the benefit of their programmes.

Mr. Portillo: Yes.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which international rules and conventions require United Kingdom local authority self-financing expenditure to be categorised as public expenditure; and which states adhere to these rules and conventions.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* Local authorities are part of the public sector and their expenditure is public expenditure. All local authority expenditure, including self-financed expenditure, in the United Kingdom has, for many years, been included in general Government spending under international conventions. These conventions were restated most recently in the "System of National Accounts", published jointly by the Commission of the European Communities, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations and World Bank at the end of last year. It is expected that all European Union and European Free Trade Association countries will produce accounts on this basis.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Addiction

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notifications were made of drug addiction for London and for England in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is published in table A3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 10/94, "Statistics of Drug Addicts Notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom 1993 (Area Tables)". A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Police Baton Training

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra resources this Department will provide to finance the costs of special training needed to make available to all officers the side-handled baton.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is for chief officers of police to decide how to equip and train their officers. The cost must be met out of normal police funds.

EU Meetings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the results of the meeting of the interior Ministers of the member states of the European Union treaty in Thessalonika, Greece on 6 and 7 May.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave him on 18 May, *Official Report*, column *461*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what agenda has been proposed for the next meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers of the member states of the European Union meeting in accordance with title VI of the European Union treaty on 20 and 21 June in Greece.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The meeting took place on 20 June in Luxembourg. It was the third Justice and Home Affairs Council held under the provisions of the treaty on European Union. The main points dealt with by the Council were as follows:

The Council adopted the resolution on limitations on admission of third-country nationals to the member states for employment.

The Council expressed its appreciation for the Commission's communication on immigration and asylum policies and undertook to consider the possibility of including in a forthcoming work programme those aspects of the proposals which fall within title VI of the treaty on European Union.

The Council agreed the selection of consultants to undertake a study of users' requirements for EURODAC, the proposed automated fingerprinting system for asylum applicants.

The Council approved the budget for the European Drugs Unit for 1995. It appointed Mr. Jurgen Storbeck as director of the Europol Drugs Unit and decided to extend the temporary appointment of Mr. Willy Bruggeman, the acting assistant director, for a further six months.

The Council noted progress on the Europol convention, and commissioned further work by officials on the outstanding points.

The Council invited officials to continue their work on the customs information system convention with a view to its being concluded as quickly as possible. The Council agreed that the incoming German presidency would inform the European Parliament about the main elements of the draft convention. It also discussed progress on the European information system convention.

The Council heard presentations from the Commission on its overall strategy to combat drugs, and on its proposals on the legal protection of the Community's financial interests. The Council agreed that work on fraud should proceed on the basis of both the joint action proposed by the United Kingdom in March and the Commission's proposals.

The Council considered means of carrying on contracts with certain third countries on title VI matters. Officials were instructed to continue work in this area, with a view to agreement being reached by the end of the German presidency.

The Council agreed that work should proceed on the extension of the Brussels convention to matters of family and succession law.

The Council heard a report from the presidency which summarised the current status of work on extradition.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a list of the formal meetings at which representatives of the British Government have attended in accordance with article K3 of the European Union treaty since the coming into force of that treaty together with the subject matter under consideration at the meeting and the title of the official representing the British Government.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 16 May, *Official Report*, columns *339-40.*

EU Citizens

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many citizens of the European Union to whom notices that their presence in the United Kingdom was no longer lawful were issued in the past 12 months had already been in employment;

(2) how many applications were received for residence permits for citizens of the European Union seeking to establish themselves in business in the United Kingdom over the past 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available.

Immigration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action is currently being undertaken as proposed in the Commission's communication on immigration and asylum of February 1994 to approximate the harmonisation admission policies for humanitarian reasons of the European Union member states;

(2) what action is being taken to harmonise schemes for temporary protection in the European Union member states as proposed in the Commission's communication on immigration and asylum of February 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No specific proposals for harmonisation in these areas have been put forward.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what actions have been taken under the European Council's 1992 declaration on principles governing the external aspects of migration policy to tackle root causes of various types of migratory movements.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No specific action has been taken, but the declaration has informed subsequent discussions on these issues between the member states.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made over the past 12 months for persons to come to the United Kingdom or continue residence in the United Kingdom as persons of independent means on the basis of capital assets of £200,000 or guaranteed income of £20,000 and a close connection with the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on persons of independent means applying for entry clearance, or admitted to the United Kingdom is not available. The available information relates to such persons with capital assets of not less than £200,000 or income of not less than £20,000 a year and a close connection with the United Kingdom, plus if there were no close connection, capital assets of not less than £500,000; 120 such persons were granted an extension of stay, and 140 were granted settlement, in 1993.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were *(a)* received and *(b)* refused in the past 12 months for a person to come to the United Kingdom as a business person under the immigration rules.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider his decision to expel Dr. Xu Li-Quin as an illegal immigrant.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Dr. Xu is not and has not been treated as an illegal entrant, nor has he been subject to any procedures to expel him. He had been refused further leave to remain in the United Kingdom, in accordance with the immigration rules, following a decision by the Department of Employment not to extend its approval of his employment. That Department has now reconsidered the case in the light of further information, and as a result Dr. Xu will be granted further leave to remain.

Firearms

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy not to raise the level of fees for firearm and shotgun certificates.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. The fees for the grant and renewal of firearm and shotgun certificates are currently under review.

Blakenhurst Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a list of all the subcontractors providing services at or relating to Blakenhurst prison; and if he will list in each case the services provided, the length of the contract, and the cost of the contract.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 July 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the subcontractors at Blakenhurst; the services provided, the length of the contract and the cost of the contract.

The subcontractors concerned and the services they provide are as follows:

Mowlem Training: Education
Worcester Royal Infirmary: Hospital
Maintenance
Robert O'Neill: Mechanical Services
Sword Brothers: Electricians
Detail Design Engineering
Marcom Camera Services
CHS Water Treatment
DJS: Painters
Westwoods: Carpenters
Wormold Britannia: Alarm specialists
Baron Pest Control
Elliot Brothers: Lightening Conductors
Huffey Construction
HMP Hewell Grange: Ground maintenance

Although they may not employ subcontractors without our express authority, the value and length of the contracts with subcontractors are matters for United Kingdom Detention Services to determine and to decide whether they should be disclosed.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give the number of offences reported in each police force area in England and Wales for each quarter of 1993 and for the first quarter of 1994 for each category of crime;

(2) if he will give the percentage change in offences reported in each police force area in England and Wales between each quarter of 1993 and the first quarter of 1994 and the corresponding quarter 12 months previously for each category of crime;

(3) if he will give the number of offences reported in each police force area in England and Wales for *(a)* home burglary, *(b)* other burglary, *(c)* theft of a motor vehicle and *(d)* theft from a motor vehicle for each quarter of 1993 and for the first quarter of 1994;

(4) if he will give the percentage change in offences of *(a)* home burglary, *(b)* other burglary, *(c)* theft of a motor vehicle and *(d)* theft from a motor vehicle between each quarter of 1993 and the first quarter of 1994 and the equivalent quarter 12 months previously.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 28 June 1994]:* The available statistics for 1993 are in the form of notifiable offences recorded by the police. In view of the length of the relevant statistical tables these have been placed in the Library. Information for the first half of 1994 will be published later this year.

Betting and Gaming

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give consideration to allowing the sale of national lottery tickets in licensed betting offices.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

I have no plans to reconsider the regulations made under section 12 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 which prohibit the sale of national lottery tickets in licensed betting offices.

DEFENCE

Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long the buildings formerly occupied by the Dreadnought seamen's hospital, adjoining the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, have been vacant and unused.

Mr. Hanley: The site, which has been vacant and unused for eight years, has been leased by the Greenwich hospital trust to the Greenwich health authority, which is responsible for maintaining the buildings in a wind and weatherproof state and for providing site security.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants are employed in his Department.

Mr. Aitken: The total number of civilian personnel employed by my Department on 1 May 1994 was 141,700.

Test Ranges (Radiation)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessments have been undertaken by his Department's Defence Radiological Protection Service of the health and environmental aspects of testing conducted at the departmental test ranges at Dundrennan and Eskmeals.

Mr. Aitken: Although no assessment has been carried out this year, we intend to conduct a survey in the autumn.

Drivers and Batmen

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many posts for serving officers there are where there is an entitlement to the services of *(a)* a driver and *(b)* a batman.

Mr. Hanley: Information on entitlements to drivers is only held centrally for two-star officers and above—currently there are 114 such officers in posts which carry an entitlement to a dedicated staff car and driver. Officers below this level may be entitled to such facilities depending on the nature of their duties. The majority of these are commanders of Army formations and units, whose drivers carry out the same duties for them on deployments.

Information on all posts which carry an entitlement to the services traditionally carried out by a batman—usually a steward who can carry out the duties in addition to his or her other tasks—is not held centrally. There are currently 77 posts where the postholder occupies an official service residence and is thereby entitled to this service from the house staff. Other posts will carry a similar entitlement only where the representational and official entertainment obligations warrant it.

Arms Sales

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role Richard John Rainey Unwin played in connection with *(a)* the Jordanian defence packages, *(b)* the Al Yamamah Saudi arms deal, *(c)* the Pergau and Malaysian arms deal, *(d)* the Oman arms deal, *(e)* the Brunei arms deal and *(f)* the Indonesian arms deal.

Mr. Aitken: It is not the policy of the Government to comment in detail on defence export matters.

SCOTLAND

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the actual expenditure on the environmentally sensitive area schemes in *(a)* Whitlaw and Eildon and *(b)* Stewartry in each financial year since 1989.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table:

	Whitlaw/ Eildon £	*Stewartry* £
1989-90	34,798	307,461
1990-91	45,155	456,357
1991-92	53,785	480,039
1992-93	54,735	511,826
1993-94	50,143	452,770

Mr. Lang: As explained in the answer I gave the hon. Member on 23 May, columns *21-22*, individual ESAs are not given an allocated budget. Expenditure is contained within the overall ESA scheme provision.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the allocated budget for each of the environmentally sensitive area schemes in Scotland for each year since 1989.

Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration was given to holding fatal accident inquiries following the deaths of three people in Scotland from Creutzfeld-Jakob disease; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crown Office has been able to identify only one case reported by a procurator fiscal in which one of the causes of the death was given as Creutzfeld-Jakob disease. Consideration was given to the possibility of holding a fatal accident inquiry, but Crown counsel concluded that it was not appropriate to hold an inquiry in that case.

Dumbarton Sheriff Court

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the future of Dumbarton sheriff court.

Mr. Lang: A new site at Meadow Park in central Dumbarton has now been identified for the replacement sheriff court house and, subject to a satisfactory survey of the ground and completion of negotiations for its acquisition, detailed planning will start as soon as possible.

Dangerous Plants

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to bring forward measures to restrict the sale from supermarkets, garden centres and other retail outlets of Dieffenbachia picta (Dumb Cane) and other species of that genus, or to make the prominent display of safety warning labels mandatory at sites of sale; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The conditions under which potentially hazardous plants are sold by supermarkets and garden centres is a matter currently being considered by the horticultural industry. This is an industry-led initiative and a good example of self-regulation.

Final consideration is being given to a voluntary code of practice which will be published later in the summer.

National Monuments

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will designate the Wallace monument in Elderslie as a national monument; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will publish a table showing all listed buildings in the Paisley, South constituency, their location, their category listing and the reason for their listing.

Sir Hector Monro: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Historic Scotland. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Graeme Munro to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 1 July 1994:

I refer to your written Questions to the Secretary of State, for answer on 24 June, regarding listed buildings in the Paisley South constituency and the Wallace Monument at Elderslie.

Copies of the lists for Paisley Burgh and the remainder of Renfrew District were enclosed with my letter of 19 May 1993 in reply to your previous Question about listed buildings (see Official Report, Vol. 225, col. 215). There have been some additions to and deletions from the statutory lists since that date and I enclose copy extracts to add to the lists you already have. I have also deposited this information in the House of Commons Library.

You have asked that the Wallace monument at Elderslie be designated as a national monument. It is already listed as a building of special architectural or historic interest. Among the set of list descriptions you already have you will find a copy of the list description for the Wallace monument in Elderslie which was listed category B on 10 June 1971. For each of reference, I enclose another copy of the description.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the level of expenditure on sheltered placement schemes for each regional council in Scotland; what is the per capita expenditure region by region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The planned level of expenditure by each regional authority on sheltered employment in 1994-95 and the per capita amount in each case is shown in the table.

Region	*1994-95 Budget Estimate (£000)*	*Expenditure per capita (£)*
Borders	53	0·50
Central	354	1·30
Dumfries and Galloway	41	0·28
Fife	1,321	3·76
Grampian	1,536	2·91
Highland	354	1·71
Lothian	1,470	1·95
Strathclyde	2,692	1·18
Tayside	1,242	3·14

Nature Conservation Orders

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *917-18*, how many more nature conservation orders he has granted or refused under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in Scotland; how many are still in force; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: One further nature conservation order has been made by my right hon. Friend and is still in force, bringing the total in force in Scotland to 12. No requests to make such orders from Scottish Natural Heritage have been refused.

Wildlife and Countryside Act

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 March, *Official Report*, column *124*, how many further prosecutions have been taken under section 28 or 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: As before, the information requested is not separately identifiable in the Scottish Office classification of crimes and offences.

Children's Play Areas

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make available additional funding to district councils in Scotland to be specifically targeted on the installation of safety surfacing in children's play areas; what studies he has undertaken on the cost benefit of such surfacing; how much was spent by the Scottish health service in each of the past five years on the treatment of accidents associated with children's play areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no plans to target resources in this way. District councils have complete freedom to determine their own priorities for capital expenditure on their general services programme. They are, therefore, free to invest in the installation of safety surfacing in children's play areas if they so wish. The Scottish Office has not undertaken any studies on the cost benefit of such surfacing and information is not collected separately about the treatment of accidents associated with children's play areas.

Right to Buy

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total revenue gathered by the sale of *(a)* local authority and *(b)* Scottish Homes houses in each year since 1980; what was the percentage of the housing capital programme for *(a)* each local authority and *(b)* for Scottish Homes which was financed from the sale of houses during the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the tables. Disaggregated details of receipts from house sales are not available for 1980-81.

Since 1980, the sale of public sector housing in Scotland has enabled over 284,000 tenants to fulfil their aspirations to home ownership, while generating capital receipts of over £3 billion for reinvestment in Scotland's housing stock.

Capital receipts from house sales

£ million

	Local authorities	*Scottish Special Housing Association/ Scottish Homes*
1980-81	26	16
1981-82	63	17
1982-83	102	19
1983-84	123	30
1984-85	119	35
1985-86	106	25
1986-87	120	22
1987-88	169	46
1988-89	258	78
1989-90	309	70
1990-91	258	38
1991-92	247	51
1992-93	270	51
1993-94	246	64

Capital receipts from house sales expressed as a percentage of HRA capital programme

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Local housing authorities in Scotland	24·9	39·9	40·4	46·5	36·0	34·8	37·0	55·1	63·5	52·6	52·6	60·9	55·2
Berwickshire	34·9	37·7	87·8	109·6	44·4	101·5	67·0	118·7	89·6	74·3	78·6	85·8	91·6
Ettrick and Lauderdale	64·1	73·5	103·8	198·2	115·6	88·2	80·1	87·4	86·6	56·8	52·8	46·5	46·0
Roxburgh	53·1	18·4	30·5	50·9	44·6	43·7	38·8	52·7	37·2	28·7	40·5	41·4	53·0
Tweeddale	98·8	225·7	126·5	69·0	59·9	34·2	31·3	113·9	121·4	63·0	39·4	41·3	45·7
Clackmannan	31·2	28·3	56·6	66·5	42·8	42·1	44·0	59·0	72·4	61·0	56·4	76·5	82·8
Falkirk	34·6	50·0	68·3	65·5	44·0	37·2	49·2	62·0	74·3	54·2	47·2	69·4	65·1
Stirling	11·4	20·8	50·7	50·4	37·8	43·0	44·4	60·7	66·2	61·4	56·6	68·8	70·5
Annandale and Eskdale	34·8	31·9	21·0	29·4	32·7	35·8	38·3	53·1	54·4	41·9	48·3	63·9	63·7
Nithsdale	94·6	25·7	44·4	40·3	44·5	43·1	43·7	56·1	45·1	33·7	38·4	46·8	47·8
Stewartry	50·9	35·8	21·9	40·6	24·0	35·8	51·0	41·8	47·7	42·3	51·4	68·7	77·1
Wigtown	76·6	31·5	49·1	54·2	35·2	32·2	30·4	36·8	32·5	30·9	35·1	66·7	60·9
Dunfermline	79·8	66·0	122·9	71·8	43·2	38·5	40·8	67·1	77·5	61·9	52·9	67·6	61·8
Kirkcaldy	14·2	35·8	58·0	86·3	72·7	47·9	40·1	52·4	60·8	59·1	70·7	88·1	85·7
North East Fife	78·3	83·4	66·2	71·1	52·6	52·9	58·3	84·4	104·2	0·0	80·6	78·4	72·0
Aberdeen	13·0	99·4	64·8	69·5	49·5	33·5	28·8	45·3	52·6	62·3	60·8	109·8	109·2
Banff and Buchan	31·8	38·3	65·0	89·0	73·9	64·9	58·7	77·7	74·3	63·3	74·7	118·4	86·8
Gordon	26·4	39·3	56·8	62·5	26·7	32·5	17·0	13·7	21·4	25·6	36·7	46·0	39·9
Kincardine and Deeside	72·9	35·5	33·8	28·7	33·9	20·8	15·1	23·7	17·4	14·9	33·9	42·0	80·7
Moray	37·4	24·0	49·8	68·6	73·6	67·8	55·8	79·9	84·6	62·9	71·0	87·6	95·0
Badenoch and Strathspey	47·5	20·6	31·7	28·4	31·5	104·3	61·9	96·1	59·1	29·0	37·8	42·1	72·6
Caithness	53·7	24·1	32·8	33·3	24·5	22·5	29·7	20·3	12·7	16·0	17·8	26·7	38·8
Inverness	49·5	55·1	28·8	28·1	36·3	27·7	30·5	37·4	49·1	40·6	43·7	67·1	55·9
Lochaber	17·5	22·8	22·8	18·7	15·2	26·5	31·6	36·3	36·1	0·0	40·4	43·4	54·3
Nairn	36·5	61·0	51·2	76·8	33·5	33·7	16·7	22·0	25·3	32·1	38·8	40·7	59·8
Ross and Cromarty	37·0	17·8	19·6	13·6	14·7	19·8	13·3	20·9	21·7	26·7	40·0	49·1	45·2
Skye and Lochalsh	38·2	9·8	19·0	16·6	9·8	15·7	11·5	15·8	10·6	22·7	17·8	22·2	35·1
Sutherland	32·2	14·0	18·1	8·5	13·5	6·4	15·1	18·8	14·8	15·9	33·2	37·9	41·4
East Lothian	18·7	69·9	62·0	82·2	46·6	49·0	61·7	81·5	92·4	69·0	80·6	82·8	68·0
Edinburgh	45·6	60·2	50·5	67·8	44·9	30·8	30·9	70·5	83·2	63·2	53·5	46·8	38·4
Midlothian	26·0	100·4	107·4	84·1	62·9	61·1	73·4	134·8	137·9	80·8	72·8	76·6	50·1
West Lothian	27·1	32·2	53·0	45·2	38·5	33·7	41·4	70·6	86·5	84·2	69·8	108·9	78·9
Argyll and Bute	20·7	24·4	35·5	47·7	61·5	36·1	32·0	37·9	48·1	62·7	73·8	61·8	70·3
Bearsden and Milngavie	56·8	40·4	99·5	85·9	43·1	33·9	25·1	33·4	63·4	78·8	65·4	69·0	75·4
Clydebank	0·0	30·1	23·2	24·0	22·2	35·8	32·8	64·4	65·6	84·3	63·6	75·1	49·4
Clydesdale	22·0	17·0	22·4	29·7	45·6	48·0	50·8	95·7	107·9	53·8	52·7	57·6	60·0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	23·1	15·4	42·1	35·6	45·6	52·8	47·8	85·3	103·3	58·0	76·1	67·3	81·4
Cumnock and Doon Valley	37·0	21·4	40·9	27·4	32·7	57·4	59·9	77·6	60·0	47·2	62·9	61·7	75·4
Cunninghame	23·0	36·5	34·3	56·2	45·3	53·7	59·7	75·1	85·3	0·0	56·5	54·9	66·2

	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Dumbarton	15·7	45·5	59·3	84·7	32·4	32·0	31·0	78·3	85·8	55·7	36·2	30·6	50·3
East Kilbride	50·1	38·2	33·7	42·3	52·2	86·9	113·5	168·8	109·2	90·6	59·4	78·7	62·9
Eastwood	73·7	159·3	44·2	49·9	41·3	77·0	58·7	67·2	68·2	47·7	34·3	84·0	66·3
Glasgow	2·8	27·5	13·8	12·5	11·9	13·6	17·8	32·9	45·6	45·8	41·8	43·0	33·2
Hamilton	9·2	45·1	39·0	43·7	30·7	54·3	58·0	82·6	89·7	79·2	66·2	76·7	80·3
Inverclyde	20·5	22·2	37·4	63·6	65·8	40·2	43·7	36·1	42·9	38·3	42·0	52·0	38·1
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	38·4	43·7	48·6	47·5	44·0	54·8	53·8	83·6	91·0	48·1	55·7	61·3	56·5
Kyle and Carrick	18·7	38·5	51·1	72·7	63·6	83·9	75·1	98·7	109·4	82·1	63·6	84·4	76·8
Monklands	5·3	11·0	9·9	21·4	19·1	38·6	34·9	51·0	70·0	54·1	61·7	72·7	76·8
Motherwell	40·0	25·0	19·7	34·2	36·1	36·5	47·3	54·4	61·8	67·2	48·8	62·1	65·6
Renfrew	30·4	67·5	35·2	42·6	38·0	38·6	51·1	57·4	82·8	55·5	55·8	66·1	46·2
Strathkelvin	43·3	38·1	41·3	42·1	50·5	54·4	79·3	89·4	74·6	56·6	59·4	80·2	63·3
Angus	70·1	69·3	92·2	109·0	66·5	61·0	72·3	90·2	76·9	54·0	70·3	56·9	66·1
Dundee	16·6	24·3	24·2	42·8	32·4	28·6	24·1	47·4	66·8	74·7	63·2	52·3	53·1
Perth and Kinross	66·5	140·8	76·1	51·7	58·6	56·6	63·8	66·7	76·7	93·9	81·2	92·6	38·7
Orkney	146·7	24·0	15·9	9·9	29·9	54·8	41·3	64·8	67·2	46·1	306·1	182·2	181·2
Shetland	25·5	20·5	24·3	10·0	9·7	7·4	16·0	10·5	8·7	8·6	12·6	19·3	29·3
Western Isles	11·3	24·4	20·7	14·5	13·5	13·2	7·0	5·8	9·2	10·4	15·2	11·3	24·9
Scottish Special Housing Association/Scottish Homes[1]	37·8	32·2	47·6	59·3	56·8	39·3	71·9	125·8	71·4	20·3	19·1	15·0	17·4

[1] Based on the housing capital programme of the Scottish Special Housing Association up to 1988-89; and, thereafter, on Scottish Homes total programme expenditure.

Test Range, Dundrennan

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence or the director of the Defence Research Agency in regard to the future of the test range at Dundrennan, Kirkcudbright.

Mr. Lang: I am in regular contact with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about this and many other matters.

Marshland

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his assessment of the value of marshland areas in lochs for the safeguarding of water quality; and what advice he has had on this topic from the advisory committee on sites of special scientific interest.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* There is no doubt about the importance of marshland areas in lochs both for safeguarding water quality and for providing shelter for wildfowl and other aquatic wildlife. The United Kingdom is a contracting party to the Ramsar convention on wetlands of international importance and a total of 25 sites in Scotland have been designated under its terms. More will follow. In additon many marshlands and similar wetland areas such as fens, flushes and mosses have been notified as sites of special scientific interest. It is for Scottish Natural Heritage to advise my right hon. Friend in relation to these issues. The advisory committee on sites of special scientific interest provides advice to SNH where there are objections on scientific grounds to the notification of such sites.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he and SNH have had from the advisory committee on sites of special scientific interest in relation to the Lake of Menteith concerning the preservation of the peripheral marshland areas, and their value in controlling the chemistry of inflowing burns.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The statutory function of the advisory committee on sites of special scientific interest is to provide advice to Scottish Natural Heritage when there are objections on scientific grounds to the notification of a particular site. The committee does not provide advice to my right hon. Friend.

In its advice to SNH the committee endorsed, inter alia, the inclusion in the site of special scientific interest of the burns which feed the Lake of Menteith so as to maintain its hydrological integrity. It recommended that the width of the areas adjacent to the burns should vary according to topography, soil type and land use.

SNH accepted nine of the committee's 10 recommendations on aspects of this case but did not accept the recommendation on "buffer zones". It proceeded with "buffer zones" of uniform width to produce a boundary that would be more straightforward to apply in practice. The committee provided no advice on marshland areas, of which the site has relatively few.

Sheep Quotas

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to have installed the necessary computer programme to enable the issue of top-up payments to those whose sheep quota entitlements have been adjusted; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* The computer programme is already in place and the payments of sheep annual premium issued in May 1994 to more than 15,500 claimants reflected their latest quota position. This includes any adjustment already made to take account of quota allocated from categories 1 and 2 of the national reserve. Any top-up payments to producers whose quotas are further adjusted will be made as soon as possible after the adjustment has been made.

Departmental Books

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the titles of the *(a)* video recordings, *(b)* audio recordings, *(c)* books, *(d)* periodicals and magazines, *(e)* professional and trades journals and *(f)* other publications he has obtained for his Department since 1 June 1993.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 June 1994]:* During the period from 1 June 1993, a large number of books and periodicals have been purchased for use by my Department and its agencies. I regret that information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Rhydlafar Hospital

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hip and joint replacement operations upon Mid Glamorgan patients have been made at Rhydlafar hospital in 1992, 1993 and so far in 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information for 1993-94 is not yet available. Figures for 1991-92 and 1992-93 financial years are given in the table:

Hip and knee replacement operations[1]

Year	*Number*
1991-92	137
1992-93	160

[1] Includes joint replacements, revisions and conversions.
Source: Patient Episode Data base for Wales.

Dental Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average salary for dentists offering a full NHS service in Wales in 1993; what was the average salary of a dentist who practises in the private sector in Wales in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available in the form requested. During 1993, general dental practitioners in Wales received £65,820,972 in respect of their NHS patients. On the basis that there were 834 general dental practitioners in Wales as at 30 June 1993 this would give average gross income of £78,922 per practitioner. The income for individual practitioners ranged from £2 to £276,437. Figures for dentists' earnings in the private sector are not available.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dental practices which offered a full NHS dental service closed in Wales in 1993; how many practices which offered the same full NHS dental service opened in Wales in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The requested information is not available centrally.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered dentists there are in *(a)* Clwyd, *(b)* Gwynedd, *(c)* Dyfed, *(d)* Powys, *(e)* Gwent, *(f)* South Glamorgan, *(g)* West Glamorgan, *(h)* Mid Glamorgan and *(i)* Wales; how many of these registered dentists offer a full NHS dental service for the population of the above areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available information, which relates to the number of registered dentists—principals, assistants and vocational trainees—in the general dental service as at 31 March 1994, is given in the table. Dentists practising in more than one family health services authority are counted in each FHSA but only once in the Wales total. It is not known centrally how many of these dentists offer a full NHS dental service.

	[1]*Number of dentists*
Clwyd	128
Gwynedd	72
Dyfed	114
Powys	40
Gwent	169
South Glamorgan	153
West Glamorgan	140
Mid Glamorgan	138
WALES	858

[1] Provisional (based on notifications received up to 28 April 1994).

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he proposes to make for the filling of the post of chairman of the Development Board for Rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 June 1994]:* An announcement will be made in due course.

TRANSPORT

M25

Sir Geoffrey Pattie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will clarify the time scale for the pilot scheme to introduce variable speed limits by using electronic sensors to monitor traffic flows and activate message signs on the south-west sector of the M25.

Mr. Key: I expect the M25 controlled motorways pilot scheme to be operational by Easter 1995, subject to the granting of type approval for the new system by the Home Office, and to the enforcement procedures with the police being in place. The pilot scheme will be assessed after the first 12 months' operation.

Civil Service (Privilege Day)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the privilege day as granted to staff in his Department for the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen is a privilege day within the meaning of section 3.5 of the civil service management code.

Mr. Norris: I can confirm that the privilege day referred to is a privilege day within the meaning of section 3.5 of the civil service management code.

Transport Research Laboratory

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on road safety research of the proposed reduction in the number of staff at the Transport Research Laboratory.

Mr. Key: The chief executive has assured me that the proposed reduction in the number of staff at the Transport Research Laboratory will have regard to the need to meet, in competition with other research suppliers, the Government's future requirement for road safety research.

Air Traffic Safety

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the near miss between two large passenger aircraft over Ilford at approximately 18.16 hours on Friday 17 June.

Mr. Norris: My officials have consulted the Civil Aviation Authority about this. They have so far been unable to find any evidence of an air miss on the day stated involving two large passenger aircraft in the Ilford area.

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received of problems for aircraft following immediately behind Boeing 757 aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: Reports of this kind are made to the Civil Aviation Authority's national air traffic services, under the wake vortex incident reporting scheme. In 1991, NATS reported its findings from operating the Wake Vortex database in CAA paper 91015—"United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority Wake Vortex Database: Analysis of Incidents Reported Between 1982 and 1990". The subject of B757 aircraft was covered in section 7 of that report.

Highways Agency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the Highways Agency has spent on public relations to date; what is its public relations budget for this year; and to which companies it has awarded any contracts for public relations work.

Mr. Key: This question is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. The chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, has written to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 24 June 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on how much the Highways Agency has spent on public relations; what is the public relations budget for this year; what companies have been awarded contracts for public relations work.

Latest figures show that the Highways Agency has spent some £38,000, excluding VAT, on public relations, mainly on regional press activity relating to road maintenance and construction schemes.

An overall public relations budget has yet to be established.

The Central Office of Information provides press services in the regions. The Highways Agency has its own press office to deal with national issues.

Railways (Objectives)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what objectives he has set for the chairmen of British Rail and Railtrack for 1994-95.

Mr. MacGregor: I have written to the chairmen, separately, setting their objectives. Copies of the letters have been placed in the Library.

Cones Hotline

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to public funds of the cones hotline.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 14 June 1994]:* This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 30 June 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to public funds of the Cones Hotline. As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, I have been asked to reply.

The new dedicated Cones Hotline telephone number, which became operational in March this year, is costing approximately £450 per month, including call charges. Other running costs are not separately identifiable since they have been, and are still being, met from within budgets agreed before the Hotline was established.

Twyford Down

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total cost to date of court action taken against protestors against the M3 Twyford Down section; and what amount he expects to recoup from protestors.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 27 June 1994]:* This question relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John Denham, dated 30 June 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Robert Key, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost of court action against protestors against the M3 through Twyford Down and how much we expect to recover from them.

The total cost of legal fees to date in connection with action against trespassers on the M3 construction site is approximately £216,000 excluding VAT.

The amount of award against the defendants is the matter for adjudication by the Court.

Batheaston Bypass

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which firm of private detectives is employed by the Highways Agency to monitor the Batheaston bypass; if he will give details of the value, period and purpose of the contract; and what guidelines and instructions have been given to the firm by the Highways Agency.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 28 June 1994]:* The question is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. The chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, is writing to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Don Foster, dated 30 June 1994:

I am writing in response to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Transport about the use of a firm of private detectives to monitor the Batheaston/Swainswick Bypass. This is a matter for which the Highways Agency is responsible.

Brays Detective Agency has been appointed by solicitors engaged by the Highways Agency. The appointment will last only as long as the firm's services are required, so its cost and duration are not known at present. The firm is being employed at Batheaston in connection with possible legal action to gain control of the land on which this much needed bypass is being built. Their instructions are to record and collate evidence relating to trespass on the construction site, so that such evidence may be presented in legal proceedings if required.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nitrate Sensitive Areas

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made with the implementation of the nitrate sensitive areas scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Following extensive consultations on the nitrate sensitive areas scheme, I am very pleased to announce that details of the new scheme are available from today. The necessary Statutory Instrument designating the NSAs and setting out the measures and associated payment rates has been laid before Parliament.

The new scheme will build upon and extend the voluntary approach introduced by the 10 pilot NSAs in 1990. The 22 new NSAs cover 28 separate water sources where nitrate levels exceed, or are predicted to exceed, the EC limit of 50 mg per/litre and will add a further 35,000 hectares to the 10,500 hectares of the pilot NSAs.

Farmers in these areas will have the opportunity to reduce nitrate leaching from their land by opting to make substantial changes to their farming systems. The new scheme offers increased flexibility and farmers can choose to enter land on a field-by-field basis, within a range of options, into agreements lasting for five years. I hope that all farmers in the NSAs will feel able to enter land into the scheme.

The pilot NSAs are already demonstrating that NSA measures, are effective in reducing nitrate leaching. I am confident that this new scheme will make a major contribution towards ensuring the future viability of these key sources of public drinking water.

All farmers with land in the NSAs will automatically be sent an information pack about the scheme by their local Ministry regional service centre. Applications to join the scheme this year must be returned to regional service centres by 19 August.

The new nitrate sensitive areas scheme is one of the six EC-assisted environmental schemes which MAFF is launching this year as a consequence of the common agricultural policy reforms agreed in 1992. Total expenditure on the NSA schemes is planned to rise to £8·3 million a year.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 245**

SESSION 1993–94

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